Increasing Learning Success

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Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Main entry under title.

Increasing Learning Success: Nova Scotia. Department of Education. Student Services.

ISBN: 1-55457-105-7

1. Education, secondary – Nova Scotia 2. Special education – Nova Scotia 3. Active learning I. Nova Scotia. Department of Education. Student Services.

371.95'09716 – dc22 2008

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Introduction

In light of new understanding of how our brains work, and armed with the knowledge that intelligence and learning styles are multi-dimensional, a number of high schools in Nova Scotia are introducing changes to more fully engage students and to support teachers in the process. Some are initiating more effective approaches to their organization, scheduling, curriculum delivery, and instruction and assessment practices. Other schools are examining factors related to absenteeism, retention, and student engagement and are generating strategies for meeting the needs of diverse learners. Still, many of our students (as many as 30 percent) continue to be disengaged, frustrated, alienated, and marginalized with their learning experiences in high school. While some high schools are rethinking programs and practices based on new developments and research, some retain the organization, routines, and traditional practices of high schools 50 years ago.

Graduates and Early Leavers

There are some distinct differences between the experiences of successful high school graduates and those who are disengaged and tend to leave high school early. Students attend and are motivated to complete high school for a number of reasons. In 2006–07, 84.8 percent of Nova Scotia students who started grade 9 in 2003 graduated from high school. From that group 81.4 percent of the male students and 88.5 percent of the female students graduated. Research has identified a number of factors that encourage students to persevere and complete high school:

- They see school as necessary for further education.
- They actively participate in learning activities.
- Their parents value education.
- They are motivated by grades.
- They see school as a place to socialize with friends.

- They enjoy and participate in school activities.
- They come from middle and upper socio-economic levels.

A number of students do not persevere with the high school years and leave early. Socio-economic conditions and school experiences affect "early leavers." Early leavers are more likely to come from single or no-parent families, from families who did not think high school completion was important, and from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Early leavers do not have a positive experience in school. The main reasons for leaving school are boredom and preferring work to school. Other factors include the following:

- They do not enjoy school.
- They express dissatisfaction with their courses and school rules.
- They have problems with their teachers.
- They do not participate in extra-curricular activities.
- They participate less in classes than other students.
- They have friends who are not attending any school.
- They associate with peers who do not consider high school completion important.
- They do not fit in at school.
- They do not perceive their school experiences as relevant.
- They are overwhelmed by their life experiences.

Researchers from John Hopkins University found the school that a student attends may be the deciding factor in whether he or she graduates or drops out of school (Balfanz and Legters 2004). The most successful schools and classrooms tend to be those that have relatively high achievement levels for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (*Vulnerable Children*, J. Douglas Willms, editor, 2002).

Overview of Increasing Learning Success

This document presents many aspects of practice necessary for increasing learning success for all students in secondary schools. High schools need to change their organizational structure to become student-centered environments that nuture all students (Christie, Jolivette, and Nelson 2007). The document summarizes strategies that have been implemented in high schools that engage all student and that, if implemented, can help to ensure that young people are prepared for many opportunities in the future.

Section 1:	Schools as Community discusses strategies for creating a personalized, safe, and caring learning community for students and teachers.
Section 2:	Actively Engaging Students in Learning focusses on the classroom. The section addresses relevant, rigorous, and engaging curriculum; strategies for actively involving students; cross-disciplinary learning experiences; and uses of technology in providing them.
Section 3:	Student Assessment and Evaluation—Offering Alternative Options presents such strategies as exhibitions, senior projects, rubrics, portfolios, student-led conferences, self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and communicating about student learning.
Section 4:	Organizing for Student Success focusses on alternative arrangements to our traditional conceptions to scheduling and organizing learning opportunities in high schools.
Section 5:	Communicating presents strategies for connecting with parents and the community about student learning and accomplishments as well as school priorities, policies, and practices.
Section 6:	Managing Transitions shares specific strategies to facilitate students' smooth movement from feeder schools to high school on to post-secondary education or the world of work.
Section 7:	Partnerships and Relationships summarizes ideas for expanding and extending learning opportunities by having parents and community members contribute inside the school and by having students learn out in the community.
Section 8:	Professional Development proposes strategies for supporting ongoing learning of teachers, administrators, and other adults.
Sections 9 to 12:	Four Nova Scotian secondary schools share their experiences of enhancing student engagement.
Section 13:	Successful Secondary Schools—A Summary concludes this document and provides an overview of high schools that are changing and responding to the needs of our changing high school population.

Supporting Documents, Initiatives, and Resources

The Nova Scotia Department of Education has undertaken a number of key initiatives that contribute to our knowledge of student learning and success. Three documents have been prepared to guide changes in high schools in Nova Scotia: *Senior High Schools: Comprehensive Programs and Services (1998), Youth Pathways and Transitions Strategy* (2000), *and Increasing Learning Success.*

Senior High Schools: Comprehensive Programs and Services (1998) is a discussion paper that

- provides a statistical overview of our youth today
- provides an overview of factors that have a significant impact on learning
- identifies challenges and issues that must be addressed in strengthening senior high school education
- provides an overview of current initiatives at the senior high level
- presents some models of high school improvement initiatives
- assists in the planning and development of programming, policies, and services to better meet the needs of all students

Youth Pathways and Transitions is an initiative that has as its principal focus increasing learning success in high schools. It provides a comprehensive and cohesive plan (framework and strategies) to increase support for students in achieving high school success and making successful transitions. The framework to Youth Pathways and Transitions includes the following components:

- policy framework for community-based education programs
- community-based education partnerships and protocols
- career information clearing house and career resource development
- the Nova Scotia Student LifeWork Portfolio: requirements and models
- framework for joint educational program design: Public School Programs, the Apprenticeship Program, the Nova Scotia Community College, and universities

A number of other departmental documents and initiatives provide direction and offer suggestions for increasing learning success for Nova Scotia high school students:

- curriculum guides, which offer instructional and assessment strategies designed to address the needs of diverse learners
- *Special Education Policy* Manual (1996), which outlines a program planning process for students with special needs
- *Challenge for Excellence: Enrichment and Gifted Education Resource Guide* (1999)—which supports planning and delivery of enrichment opportunites for students
- *Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling* (2007) which includes a needs assessment carried out by a committee representing the school community
- *School Code of Conduct (2001) and Provincial School Code of Conduct and School Code of Conduct Guidelines* which includes, in-service training in Positive and Effective Behavioural Supports (PEBS)

The efforts of a number of high schools across North America that are implementing alternative practices, programs, and policies to increase the learning success for all adolescents are briefly described in Appendix A.

Section 1: Schools as Community

High school is a world that adolescents inhabit for three or more years. The quality of this experience is directly related to the sense of community that the school creates for students and teachers. While individual experiences can vary dramatically, from rich and highly successful to narrow and mostly frustrating, more students flourish when their school culture is strong and people work together as a community of learners.

All students deserve schools in which they need not worry about personal safety and whose teachers and administrators know them well and can guide their development of skills and knowledge. For many students, the social context of high school is tough and unforgiving, with sharp contrasts between subgroups and socio-economic levels (haves and have-nots). Schools must build respect, civility, acceptance, and, ultimately, an atmosphere of true community.

High schools that create successful learning communities that are student centered have distinct characteristics:

- they feel and act small
- they are caring and safe places
- they have a core set of beliefs and values
- they have peer support systems
- they organize teacher advisory groups
- they offer a varied and open co-curricular program

School Size: Small is Better

Research has been rapidly accumulating evidence that school size does matter and that smaller is better. "Small" is defined as fewer than 400 students. Large schools can be organized for smallness. A number of ways of creating smallness are discussed in Section 4: Organizing for Student Success.

In small high schools—and schools that are set up to feel small—each student is known, included, appreciated, monitored, challenged, and nurtured in a collaborative community. Students and teachers benefit in many ways when schools are smaller or when big schools are organized to feel and act small.

Small school size is related to improvements in student achievement and engagement (Klonsky 1998; Lee, Bryk, and Smith 1993; Meier 1995, 1996; Raywid 1999; Visher, Emanuel, and Teitelbaum 1999; Wasley et al. 2000). More students graduate and fewer students drop out when they are in a small high school. Smallness also results in positive student behaviours including increased attendance rates, increased school loyalty, decreased frequency of disciplinary actions, decreased violence, and decreased alcohol and drug abuse. Students from small high schools also report higher levels of satisfaction with school, and more report experiencing successful school-to-work transitions.

Ayers, Klonsky, and Lyon (2000) confirm the special value of small schools for students who have not been well served by traditional high school structures. Female and non-white students do better in smaller schools. Students with special needs, including the at-risk, exceptional, disadvantaged, and gifted students are better served by smaller school units.

Small school size also has positive teacher effects. In a study of 90 small schools in Chicago (Wasley et al. 2000), teachers reported a greater sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, and connection with parents. As well, teachers had more opportunities to collaborate with other teachers, build a coherent educational program, use a variety of instructional approaches, and engage students in peer critique and analysis. Newmann (1995) found that small schools indirectly created a stronger professional community among teachers. In small schools, teachers typically have more time, opportunities, and procedures for meeting with one another, planning co-operatively, and tracking the progress of individual students.

A Safe and Caring Place

Secondary schools need to be caring and safe places for students and staff, both physically and psychologically. Students need to experience care, concern, and connection (Martin 1997) if they are to excel at learning. When the school is a caring and safe place, people are treated with respect and dignity at all times; diversity and inclusion are valued; and people experience a sense of belonging. Effective secondary schools help students make responsible choices through the continuous presence of emotional warmth, clearly defined limits, a democratic atmosphere, and an ongoing attention to relationships.

Schools must be safe and orderly. Everyone must feel secure and relaxed. When people are intimidated and fearful, they cannot be at ease. They cannot give education the single-minded attention needed for success. Schools must help students learn ways to solve problems and resolve conflicts in peaceful and appropriate ways. The *School Code of Conduct* (2001) describes the Department of Education's expectations in this regard. Adolescents need not only choices and opportunities, they also need defined limits and boundaries.

Core Beliefs and Values

Each school must fully and intentionally develop its culture. Belief statements, which the school community has developed collaboratively, fully including and respecting student voices in the process, can affect a school significantly. Such statements explicitly embody what the school values and expects for students and teachers. These statements provide the foundation for day-to-day practices, as well as a broad guide for overall operation of the school. Belief statements guide decision making about programs, instruction, assessment, policies, procedures, and problems.

Belief Statements: Examples

- Students learn at different rates and in different ways.
- Virtually all students are capable of achieving at a higher level than usually required.
- For students to develop as self-directed learners, they must be given significant opportunities to be self-directed.

Each high school's community needs to advocate and model a set of core beliefs and values. Students can learn about the school's core values through specific lessons; or the values can be embedded in the curriculum and taught in context. Values need to be modelled by all adults and leaders in the school and accentuated by school policies and practices. Establishing and maintaining a set of core values requires at least four steps:

1. developing a series of belief statements
2. determining the practices that support those statements
3. implementing successful practices
4. revisiting the belief statements and practices on a regular basis to ensure that the culture is being preserved and renewed

Peer Support Systems

Peer support systems are an important part of a school community. At different times, students require different kinds of support (academic, social, emotional, and physical), from different sources. During high school, interaction with peers is a high priority. Some students identify socializing with friends as the most important reason for going to high school. Peer helpers, peer tutors, and peer mediators are all part of a well-organized peer support system. Throughout the high school years, this support should be available at all times.

When students enter high school, an integral part of the transition orientation process should be the introduction of peer helpers, so that all students can be assured that support is available. Peer helpers provide general support and assist students with understanding the school culture, organization, programs, policies, and possibilities. This is important for students just entering the school and particularly critical for students who transfer in during a school year.

Peer tutors help other students with assignments and projects. They provide academic guidance and support. Some schools organize teams of peer tutors at each grade level; some schools give credit for peer tutors to work with other students at all grade levels. In other schools, peer critique, analysis, and feedback are structured into courses, and all students are involved in peer review and support.

Peer mediators and peer mediation programs help students work through differences and conflicts with other students, teachers, and administrators. Research studies (Aber et al. 1999; Van Sleyck and Stern 1991) document the positive effects of peer mediation programs: fewer disruptive or violent problems occurring, slower growth in incidents of hostile and aggressive actions, improved student achievement, and improved social attitudes. Successful peer mediation programs have a carefully defined organizational structure: mediators include students from many different groups, provide thorough training programs, have structures for mediation requests, and have staff advisors or sponsors. A peer mediation program can gradually help a school develop socially responsible and respectful behaviour.

Teacher Advisory Groups

Successful high schools organize adult support structures for students. Providing a teacher advisory group is one strategy for ensuring a personal adult advocate for each student in the school. Advisory groups meet frequently (e.g., three to five times per week for at least half an hour). Through teacher advisory groups, students receive academic and personal support and guidance. Advisory programs provide opportunities for students to build relationships with teachers and other students. They allow for discussions on issues important to adolescents. They ensure that all students belong and that individual needs and preferences are recognized and understood.

Typically, a student remains with the same advisor and in the same advisory group throughout the high school years. Advisory groups meet frequently (e.g., three to five times per week for at least half an hour). Teachers also meet students individually at different points during the year. Some teacher advisory groups are highly structured; others evolve as the group grows and develops together. Teacher advisors assist students with personal progress plans, portfolio development, goal setting, and working through issues and problems. They monitor student progress on an academic level as well as a personal level.

The advisor's purpose is to support the whole individual, rather than the more limited role as a teacher of subject matter. The advisor is often the student's and family's first contact at the school, to solve problems or meet

special needs. Advisors meet with students and parents regularly throughout high school to help the students craft learning plans customized to their interests.

Varied and Open Co-curricular Program

Co-curricular activities, where all students are expected to engage in at least one activity per school year, should be an integral component of the high school program. Students who participate in co-curricular activities have more consistent attendance, better academic achievement, and higher aspirations than non-participants (Minnesota State High School League, 1995). Another study found that students who devote 5 to 19 hours a week to co-curricular pursuits are less likely to use drugs or drop out of school (Zill et. al. 1995).

The co-curricular program needs to be inclusive and provide a broad range of activities to reflect the diverse interests of the student body. Students need to be aware of all the opportunities available to them in the school (student clubs, student organizations, arts activities, musical groups, sports teams, etc.) so they can make informed decisions and choices. Some schools publish a co-curricular program guide to ensure that all students know the range of possibilities. Co-curricular activities allow students to work closely with teachers and other adults in non-academic settings and to focus on their preferences and strengths. It allows teachers to know students in different ways.

Student Reward and Recognition Program

There should be a reward system in high schools that focuses on all students and not just on academic students who are inclined to do well, and many schools have implemented creative and innovative ways to recognize students. Effective and caring schools include and provide opportunities for all students, not just a few. Reward systems foster personal growth, development, and positive experiences, as well as recognition. Such reward systems encourage confidence building among students.

Reward Categories: Examples	
• most improved student	• excellence in arts
• attendance excellence	• personal growth award
• leadership excellence	• community service award
• contribution to team spirit	• creativity and innovation award

Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Program

Successful secondary schools have effective comprehensive guidance and counselling programs that provide activities and services to help students acquire personal, social, and career knowledge, as well as positive attitudes, strategies, and skills. The program includes four components: a guidance curriculum (structured experiences presented through classroom and teacher advisor groups), life/career planning (activities to assist students in planning, monitoring, and managing their learning and career plans), professional services (counselling, consultation, and co-ordination activities to meet immediate needs and concerns), and program management (activities and strategies that establish, maintain, and enhance the overall program). The comprehensive guidance and counselling program contributes to personalization and individualization of the high school experience for students (*Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling*, Nova Scotia Department of Education 2007).

Teamwork and Collaboration

Staff collegiality and collaboration are fundamental to creating a cohesive, professional learning culture where "close collaboration across diverse groups—teachers, students and parents—is the central driving force in the organization" (Oxley 1997). Collegiality in effective secondary schools develops as adults work together to solve school-level problems, plan professional development activities, analyse instructional strategies and classroom practices, and discuss how to handle problems and needs of individual students.

When teachers plan and work together, isolation is reduced, and students experience a more consistent and congruent program. Teachers who share

ideas and learn together have greater capacity to enhance student learning. Teacher teamwork and collaboration also provide a model for students so that they understand the value of co-operation in the pursuit of learning. Working together is at the heart of a school as a learning community. Teamwork expands and enriches the learning environment of the students and the staff.

Summary: Personalizing and Individualizing the High School Experience

Productive secondary schools personalize and individualize students' learning experiences. They identify students' learning styles; work with students to determine strengths and weaknesses; respect students' racial and cultural backgrounds and family experiences; recognize students' personal interests and concerns; assist students in exploring career interests; and help students prepare for life beyond high school by determining students' expectations of high school.

One of the hallmarks of effective secondary schools is the strong sense of communal identity, a sense of belonging to a professional community at an institution whose goals and values are shared (Frank 1998; Wilson and Corcoran 1988). The creation of a school culture is more dependent on the adults in the school than on the characteristics of students or economic climates of the community in which the school is located (Louis and Miles 1990).

In quality schools, individual educators believe they are personally accountable for the success of each student. This self-imposed accountability means that teachers accept responsibility for helping each student overcome impediments to success. Accepting responsibility for student achievement is essential for student and school success (Lee et al. 1995; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy 1998). The rate at which student s acquire academic skills is a strong indicators of school performance (Willms 2001). When the school feels and acts as a community, it is a better place for those who work and study there.

Section 2: Actively Engaging Students in Learning

Students spend the majority of their time at school in the classroom with teachers and their peers. A complex set of factors influences the dynamics between teachers and students and colours the resulting learning experiences of students. Student-centred classrooms look very different from traditional high school classrooms.

This section begins with a description of what student work and behaviour look like in a student-centred learning environment. Then, it summarizes new developments in learning and discusses strategies for actively involving and engaging adolescents. The chapter continues by describing the role of teachers as coaches and facilitators, as well as the specific characteristics of effective secondary school teachers. Finally, this section discusses making curriculum relevant, organizing cross-disciplinary learning experiences, and using technology to enhance student learning.

Student-Centred Learning

Student-centred learning is very different from a "transmission" view of learning which involves excessive use of teacher talk and textbooks and in which information is simply passed from teachers or textbooks to learners via lectures, reading, or viewing. When students are actively engaged in learning they

- share their ideas about and work through their interpretations of classroom events
- examine topics in greater depth
- assist, guide, and constructively criticize the work of others
- participate in authentic activities (tasks, productions, presentations)
- work more regularly with other students
- have more responsibility in the design and assessment of their learning

- have a greater investment in activities that have some utility beyond fulfilling course requirements
- achieve outcomes that are more expressive, probing, problem based, interdisciplinary, and related to their lives outside school
- use a range of technologies to support their research and the representation of their learning for specific audiences

Students in effective secondary schools take an active role in their learning and development, and teachers are creating the conditions for active student participation. Effective, secondary-level study engages students in problem solving and critical thinking, is connected to their work and life outside of school, is project-based, involves active participation, and emphasizes students constructing meaning and creating knowledge. Rigorous school work prepares students for future success; students in productive secondary schools are engaged in demanding, intellectually stimulating work (Perrone 1985; Sedlak et al. 1986; Steinberg at al. 1996). Academic focus has to be pronounced and rigorous, with additional supports for students in need (Christie, Jolivette, and Nelson 2007). Students need to be presented with challenges that cause them to think, reason, and use their minds well. High school must equip students with the ability to draw inferences, make informed judgments, engage in logical reasoning, and solve problems. Students need to develop the mind-set that orients them toward analysing material and reaching conclusions about it. Students need to learn workplace competencies that prepare them for success after high school, such as

- effective use of resources
- working constructively with others
- acquiring and using information efficiently and effectively
- understanding complex interrelationships
- working comfortably with a variety of technologies

Thiessen and Anderson (1999) found that teachers and students in transforming learning cultures use classroom time differently. They structure learning in a way to actively engage learners.

Using Classroom Time Differently	
Teachers spend more time	**Students spend more time**
• deliberating about meaningful questions • engaging students in relevant experiences • comparing ideas and finding connections • encouraging invention and production	• sharing their ideas about and working through their interpretations of classroom events • examining topics in greater depth • assisting, guiding, and critiquing others' work • participating in authentic activities (tasks, productions, presentations)

New Learning Developments

Over the past decade we have continued to learn more about how students learn and how the brain works. Constructivism, brain research, emotional intelligence, learning styles, and multiple intelligences all provide lenses through which teachers may understand the diversity of learners. Teachers need to consider these new developments in learning as they plan and facilitate learning activities.

Constructivism. Constructivists believe that learners create their own knowledge structures rather than merely receive them from others. They believe that knowledge is constructed in the mind of the learner who is "thinker, creator, and constructor." Constructivist teachers encourage and accept student autonomy and initiative; use raw data and primary sources, along with manipulative, interactive, and physical materials and electronic tools; allow student responses to drive lessons, shift instructional strategies, and alter content; inquire about students' understandings of concepts before sharing their own; encourage students to dialogue both with the teacher and with other students; foster student inquiry; provide time for students to construct relationships and create metaphors; and nurture students' curiousity (Brooks and Martin 1993).

Brain research. In the past decade, knowledge that neuro-scientists have known for some time has become more accessible to educators. We know more about the conditions under which the brain learns, how it selects and retains information, why it reacts to some stimuli and not to others. The patterns of the brain and the windows of opportunity for learning have become more articulated. Several educational researchers and practitioners (i.e., Jensen 1998; Parry and Gregory 1998; Sylwester 1995; Wolfe 2001) have written about how classrooms, instruction, and assessment need to be organized to assist students in utilizing their brains for optimal learning.

Emotional intelligence. In 1995, Daniel Goleman summarized the research and writings that have been done on emotions and the role they play in our lives and our learning. He provided a framework to describe the characteristics of emotional intelligence. There are five components to emotional intelligence: self-awareness, ability to manage emotions, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills.

People who are emotionally intelligent are very self-aware. They know their strengths and weaknesses, their learning styles, their preferences, and their interests. Emotional intelligence also involves being able to handle one's emotions particularly negative feelings in appropriate ways. Self-motivation and a generally positive outlook on life a third component of emotional intelligence; some individuals can set goals and persevere to complete projects and commitments. Empathy is a fourth component: caring for others and being able to put yourself in another's position. Finally, emotionally intelligent people have social skills and can successfully navigate many different social situations. Teachers have a major role to play in helping students to develop their emotional intelligence.

Learning styles. Students learn in different ways and have preferences about how information is presented or experienced. While there are many frameworks for explaining learning styles (i.e., Gregoric 1985; McCarty 1984; Silver and Hanson 1998), three common approaches are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Approximately 37 percent of people are kinesthetic learners; they need to be active and learn through doing; approximately 67 percent of high school drop-outs are kinesthetic learners. As students progress through the school system, learning becomes increasingly auditory and less visual. We also know that teachers tend to teach how they learn best. Unless teachers purposefully provide for all learning styles, some students will continue to be at a disadvantage in our high schools.

Multiple intelligences. Howard Gardner proposed in his 1983 book *Frames of Mind* a new theory of intelligence. He believes we are born with a number of innate abilities. To date, he has identified eight intelligences: mathematical-logical, linguistic, musical, visual, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalistic. Gardner's work is ongoing. He has recently added existential intelligence and expects to discover more. He believes that all of us are smart in some way; few of us are smart in all eight ways. Unfortunately, many schools are organized only for mathematical-logical and linguistic intelligences. This traditional approach to organizing and rewarding learning deprives many students of opportunities for success. All teachers need to become familiar with multiple intelligence theory and to ensure that they are offering multiple ways for students to learn in their classrooms. Campbell and Campbell (1999) describe how two high schools have restructured teaching and learning based on MI theory.

Student-Centred Teaching and Learning Strategies

Students bring varied learning styles, preferences, interests, skills and abilities, levels of knowledge, intelligences, and experiences to classrooms and schools. In order to respond to this diversity, teachers need to employ a range and variety of teaching strategies. Student-centred teaching strategies (e.g., co-operative learning, experiential activities, problem-based learning, debates, independent study, and laboratories) address the needs and concerns of secondary students well.

Student-centred teaching strategies engage the "student as worker" actively and more directly with content, peers, and resources. In student-centred learning, students—not the teachers—"construct" knowledge, and in so doing, they more deeply impress knowledge on themselves. This approach takes more time, and usually less material gets covered, but less will become more when students thoroughly understand what they have studied and absorb it into their permanent base of knowledge.

Co-operative learning is one of the most well-researched (Johnson and Johnson 1991; Slavin 1991) teaching strategies for student-centred learning. All students need to be taught how to work effectively in groups and have opportunities to learn in collaborative groups with others. The benefits of co-operative learning have been documented across grade levels and subject areas. Students' behaviours, attitudes, and achievement are positively influenced by working with peers in structured groups. Kagan (1995) offers a number of structures for teachers to incorporate into their existing repertoire. Johnson and Johnson (1998) have worked extensively with teachers for over two decades on another approach to co-operative learning.

Experiential learning addresses the crucial issue of relevance. When students learn through doing and in context of real experiences, they understand, and their learning becomes more meaningful. Experiential learning is particularly important for those students who struggle and those who are disengaged. Often these students are kinesthetic learners who need to see how school work connects to the world of work and life beyond school. Some schools have managed to organize regular experiential learning opportunities for all students they serve (Daniels, Bizar, and Zemelman 2000; Meier 1995).

Teaching as Coaching and Facilitating

Effective coaching leads to good performance by students; good coaches work in ways that motivate students to take more responsibility for their learning. Coaching involves a kind of teaching that creates active learners. In the coaching model, for example, the student investigates multiple approaches to solving a problem or expounds on the meaning of something. The coach remains nearby—observing, asking questions, prodding the student to reflect on the product of his or her efforts. The teacher as facilitator guides the student through the thickets of knowledge, pointing out the pitfalls and providing tips. When teachers give more prominence to coaching, teaching changes.

Teachers as Coaches	
When teachers give more prominence to coaching, teaching is	
more about	**less about**
• facilitating learning • engaging students in relevant experiences • encouraging invention and production • deliberating about meaningful questions • comparing ideas and finding connections • empowering learners	• directing learning • summarizing and structuring pertinent resources • organizing information • conveying required content • ordering tasks and reinforcing best answers • managing classrooms

When teachers use coaching and facilitating strategies for learning, they promote greater active involvement by students in their own learning. In this context, teachers

- design fewer lessons, but more extended and intensive units
- distribute fewer worksheets and receive more substantial student products
- rely less on textbooks and more on local and networked resources
- spend less time at the chalkboard and more time in activities both inside (e.g., simulations) and outside (e.g., field trips, community projects)
- test less and assess more
- provide frequent, specific, and constructive feedback
- generally focus more on students and on what and how they learn (Thiessen and Anderson 1999)

Effective Secondary School Teachers

Many studies have identified characteristics of effective secondary school teachers. Teachers' attitudes as well as their teaching practices greatly influence the success of student learning experiences.

Effective secondary school teachers
• have positive attitudes about students and about learning • form supportive relationships with students • are respectful and courteous • are open and personable • are trustworthy • are caring and helpful • are enthusiastic • are demanding • know their subject matter • create academically responsive learning environments • empower students as learners • use a range of teaching strategies • create authentic learning environments • are lifelong learners • are collaborative

Effective secondary school teachers and principals are critical to helping all students meet higher standards and leave high school ready for the transition (National Education Summit on High Schools 2005). Effective high school teachers and principals actively engage students in learning.

- **They have positive attitudes about students and about learning.** They believe that they are making a positive difference in their students' growth and capacity, and they hold a sense of possibility about learning. Most teachers in successful secondary schools believe that all students can be motivated to learn (Hoy and Hoy 1998; Wilson and Corcoran 1988; Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998).
- **They form supportive relationships with students.** The relationships between teachers and their students is the lifeblood of learning, and teachers' success in relating to students is a powerful tool (Page and Valli 1990). Teachers also support students in forming strong connections with adults by establishing bonds with individuals and with groups inside and outside the classroom.
- **They are respectful and courteous.** McLaughlin and Talbert (1994) found that students believe "the way teachers treat you as a student or as a person, actually" is more important than any other factor in determining student commitment and attachment to school. Teachers have a critical role in modelling.
- **They are open and personable.** Students want to feel connected personally to their teachers. Personal anecdotes, humour, openness, and consideration bridge age and status barriers and connect students with adults in school environments (Phelan et al. 1998).
- **They are trustworthy.** Students expect teachers to be fair in dealing with student differences and confidential about individual student's confidences (McQuillan 1998).
- **They are caring and helpful.** Students relate positively to approachable adults who understand and care about adolescents. Student perceptions of teachers as caring and helpful are a critical factor in student support (Miron 1996).
- **They are demanding.** They hold high expectations for their own performance and make explicit demands for student performance. They believe all students can learn and ensure that expectations are clear and consistent (Lee, Smith, and Croninger 1995; Nystrand 1997). They emphasize deep understanding and high-order thinking.
- **They know their subject matter.** They are experts in their respective fields and are trained and certified to teach in specific disciplines. They

have deep knowledge of content and resources (Darling-Hammond 2000; Goodlad 1997).

- **They create academically responsive learning environments.** They create learning environments where students are intensively engaged. They analyse student understanding and adapt practice accordingly—they improvise yet have planned goals in mind. They are intellectually open and organize academically challenging classrooms for learning. They are responsive to student differences and needs (Phelan et al. 1998; Wang and Gordon 1994; Wang and Reynolds 1995).
- **They empower students as learners.** They organize learning environments where students take an active role, and they assist students in taking responsibility for becoming competent, resourceful learners, rather than passive recipients (Darling-Hammond et al. 1995). They expect, encourage, and reward student independence and creativity and share their freedom with students.
- **They use a range of teaching strategies to accommodate the diverse learning needs of students and to ensure novelty and variety in learning.** They develop individualized, contextually appropriate teaching strategies and approaches to address diverse student needs.
- **They create authentic learning environments that are connected to context and to the world beyond school.** They make connections across and within disciplines. They design student learning projects that require real-life tasks.
- **They are enthusiastic.** They communicate their enthusiasm for their content, for teaching, and for students. Enthusiastic teachers are more engaged in teaching, which leads to student engagement in learning (Metz 1993). Teacher enthusiasm is linked, in part, to the success that teachers experience in getting to teach the subjects that they know and like, in schools they want to be in, with students they consider both able and interested, and among colleagues they admire (Little 1993).
- **They are lifelong learners.** They continue to learn about their discipline and about learning, teaching, and assessment. They set personal learning goals and learn from and with their colleagues on a regular basis (Rosenholtz 1989).
- **They are collaborative.** They form supportive relationships with one another to build a productive and professional learning community, weaving a common vision, creating a culture of intellectual vitality, developing an environment that supports change, participating in school improvement planning and initiatives. Collegiality and collaboration are habits in successful secondary schools.

Making Curriculum Relevant and Engaging

Learning must make sense to students in terms of the real world and the application of what they know. The relevance of curriculum and school experiences to the outside world is a major determinant of student engagement. The authenticity of school work depends largely on its connections to work and life beyond instructional settings. Learning experiences and tasks must be meaningful, valuable, significant, and worthy of one's efforts. Assignments and activities considered nonsensical, useless, contrived, or trivial are often deemed unworthy of effort (Newmann et al. 1995).

Students engage in school when they see learning as both personally possible and offering possibilities for personal gain. Learning that makes connections to more specific goals motivates students. Teachers need to make the content of their teaching relevant to the lives of students. Content connected to real life application of knowledge and skills helps students link their education to the future. Showing students how to apply what they know underscores the practicality of knowledge and heightens students' interest in the material.

When students feel they have some control with school success, they are motivated to engage in the work of learning. Giving students choices is key to creating relevance and engaging them. Earl and Lee (1998) document the many ways students' voice is incorporated in high schools involved in the Manitoba School Improvement Program. Daniels, Bizar, and Zemelmann (2000) also outline ways that students at Best Practices High School in Chicago are involved in making choices about their learning.

Interdisciplinary Study Units

Exposing students to connections among and between subjects and encouraging students to approach knowledge from a multidisciplinary perspective are a key approach for ensuring relevance and student engagement. Cross-disciplinary learning experiences constructed around themes directed at answering fundamental questions, or aimed at current issues, allow students to explore a subject or theme in depth. When teachers emphasize depth over breadth of coverage, students learn more.

Three approaches to organizing cross-disciplinary learning experiences are discussed by Thiessen and Anderson (1999) based on a cross-case analysis of 12 transforming schools in Ohio. A *multi-disciplinary* approach (where each discipline examines a particular aspect of a common area of study) tends to align content or skills, but leaves teachers in each discipline to organize their course as they see fit and largely independent of one another. In an *interdisciplinary* approach (where disciplines identify a common element that they will study together), teachers identify a topic of study where concepts and processes of two or more disciplines remain, but are connected through a common task such as a presentation, product, or exhibition. In a *transdisciplinary* approach, themes or problems compel the pursuit of knowledge that both transcends and transforms disciplinary boundaries. In an article in *Educational Leadership* (1991), Fogarty discusses 10 ways to integrate curriculum.

Using Technology to Enhance Student Learning

High schools need to develop a long-term plan for using computers, multimedia, the Internet, and other technologies in all aspects of teaching and learning. Technology must be integral to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. It must accommodate different learning styles and help teachers to individualize the learning process and improve student learning opportunities.

Using technology extends the curriculum, enabling students to pursue in-depth study more easily and giving them ready access to information and exploration tools. CD-ROMs can be used to store evidence of student work (for example, papers written, music performed, participation in sports, presentation of a group project). A set of specific learning tasks (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, desktop publishing, audio and video editing, or website research projects) can engage students with technology and prepare them for further learning and the workplace.

Ensuring that teachers learn continuously about technology as it develops is key to its utility in education. Teachers need to know how to incorporate technology into their teaching strategies and technological competence should be considered in hiring new staff members. Ongoing professional

development should be a priority for secondary schools to ensure that students are prepared for the technological expectations of the workplace and continuing learning opportunities. Every high school should consider designating a technology resource person to provide professional development and to consult with staff. The best person for this role is a certified teacher who is conversant not only with information technology (IT), but also with issues of teaching and learning. To spend funds on hardware and software without supporting teachers to learn how to integrate them in their teaching would be shortsighted. Access to board/school level technical support from trained technicians is also needed.

Summary: Authentic Pedagogy

Newmann and Wehlage (1995) offer standards for authentic pedagogy or instruction that they have organized in three categories: construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and value beyond school. Learning and instruction must involve students in higher-order thinking, deep knowledge, and substantive conversations that make strong connections to the world beyond the classroom.

Much has been learned over the last two decades about how students learn and the conditions necessary to support and promote their growth and development. Bennett and Rolheisor (2001) suggest that all teachers need to consider six lenses when they plan and facilitate learning in our classrooms: multiple intelligences, learning styles, co-operative learning, at- risk students, gender, and brain research. Teachers need to be compassionate and passionate; they need to have deep knowledge both of their subject area and of teaching and learning generally. Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) assert that good teaching (what teachers do) is not the same as successful teaching (teaching that produces student learning). With such staff in every classroom, all students will have the opportunity to tap into their strengths and become successful learners in our schools.

Section 3: Student Assessment and Evaluation—Offering Alternative Options

Introduction

Assessment and evaluation are essential to student success in school. The purpose of assessment is manifold: assessment yields rich data to evaluate student learning, the effectiveness of teaching, and the achievement of the prescribed learning outcomes. However, assessment without evaluation is insufficient, as the collection and reporting of data alone are not entirely useful unless the quality of the data is evaluated in relation to the outcomes. To this end, teachers use rubrics, criteria, marking keys, and other objective guides to evaluate the work of their students.

Assessment is the process of *collecting* information about student learning (for example, through paper and pencil tests, observation, portfolios, performance, etc). Assessment is the gathering of pertinent information.

Evaluation follows assessment by using the information gathered to determine a student's strengths, needs, and progress in meeting the learning outcomes. Evaluation is a *judgement* about the quality of the information collected in assessment.

Assessments As Learning

Assessments should be designed with a purpose. Formative assessments are designed to provide students with a continuous flow of information concerning their achievement and to encourage students to become actively involved in the process of assessment. And when students become involved in the process of assessment, it becomes assessment *as* learning. Assessment techniques such as conversation, interviews, interactive journals, and self-evaluation help students to articulate their ideas and understandings and to identify where they might need more assistance. Such techniques also provide students with insight into their thinking processes and their understandings. Thus, this kind of assessment is used, not just to allow students to check on their progress, but to advance their understandings, to encourage them to take risks, to allow them to make mistakes, and to enhance their learning. This kind of assessment also assists students in becoming self-monitoring and self-evaluating and helps them to take responsibility for their own record keeping and self-reflection.

Teachers should keep in mind that such assessment practices may be unfamiliar to students at first and that the emphasis on students being actively involved and thinking for themselves will be a challenge and, for some, awkward. Such practices, however, enable teachers and students together, to form a plan in which students are clear about what they have to do to achieve particular learning outcomes.

Assessments For Learning

Some assessments are designed by teachers as assessments *for* learning, where the purpose of such assessments is, in part, to assist students in their progress towards the achievement of learning outcomes, such as those outlined in various curriculum documents. In such assessments, the tasks used by teachers should inform students about what kinds of knowledge and skills are important.

As well, assessments for learning help teachers to know where their students are on the learning continuum, keep in touch with each student's progress, and plan what next steps are required for student success. Following assessments for learning, teachers help students toward the achievement of

specific outcomes by providing them with further opportunities to learn. In this way, such assessments are said to be formative, in that they take a developmental perspective and track students' growth through the year.

Assessments for learning are generally not included in the process of grading students. A student is graded on an outcome after an assessment of learning.

Assessments Of Learning

Other assessments are assessments *of* learning, and provide a summation of a student's achievement in relation to the outcomes. Such outcomes are documented in the prescribed curriculum documents and form the basis for the student's learning requirements. When an assessment of learning achieves its purpose, it is called summative and provides information to the teacher for the grading of student work in relation to the outcomes.

For fair student evaluation, grading should include only the results of summative assessments of learning and not formative assessments. Assessments of learning should be administered after the student has had the fullest opportunity to learn each intended outcome. Assessments of learning check for a student's achievement against the outcomes. (It should be noted, however, that an earlier, formative, assessment may reveal that the student has met the intended outcome. In this case, the assessment for learning can be seen as an assessment of learning, and the evaluation of that assessment may be used to report on the student's achievement of the outcome.)

Figure 1 on the following page is a sample teacher record showing a record of assessments *for* learning that are not included in the final evaluation and an assessment *of* learning that is used as the final evaluation of students.

Figure1: Sample Teacher Record

Student Name: _____

	Specific Curriculum Outcome C1 By the end of grade 5 students will be expected to answer, with increasing independence, their own questions and those of others by selecting relevant information from a variety of texts.	**Specific Curriculum Outcome C2** By the end of grade 5 students will be expected to recognize how conventions and characteristics of texts help them understand what they read and view.	**Specific Curriculum Outcome C3** By the end of grade 5 students will be expected to identify examples of prejudice and stereotyping in oral language and use language that shows respect for all people.
Assessment 1 Date: January 16, 2007 Event: Short story report on novel *Where the Red Fern Grows*			
Assessment 2 Date: February 2, 2007 Event: Essay on the expulsion of the Acadians			
Assessment 3 Date: February 2, 2007 Event: Group project on cigarettes			
Assessment 4 Date: February 9, 2007 Event: Presentation to class re superbowl advertising			
Assessment 5 Date: March 12, 2007 Event: Student self-evaluation re media literacy			
Assessment 6 Date: March 17, 2007 Event: End-of-unit test			

Key:
NY – student has not yet met the desired outcome (recorded, but does not count towards grade)
M – student has met the desired outcome (recorded, counts toward grade)
N/A – assessment does not address this outcome

Alignment

Assessments serve teaching and learning best when teachers integrate them closely with the ongoing instructional/learning process, when assessments are planned in advance, and when both formative and summative assessments are used appropriately. The nature of the assessments employed by the teacher must be appropriate to, and aligned with, curriculum, so that students' progress is measured by what is taught and what is expected. When learning is the focus, curriculum and assessment become opposite sides of the same coin, each serving the other in the interest of student learning and achievement. Assessments, therefore, should inform classroom decisions and motivate students by maximizing their confidence in themselves as learners. For this reason, teachers need to be prepared to understand the fundamental concepts of assessments and evaluation.

Choosing, and employing, the right kinds of assessments is critical, and teachers need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their assessment choices. As well, employing a variety of appropriate assessments improves the reliability of their evaluation and can help to improve both teaching and learning. Assessments as and for learning are the foundation of classroom assessment activities leading to assessment of learning.

Figure 2:

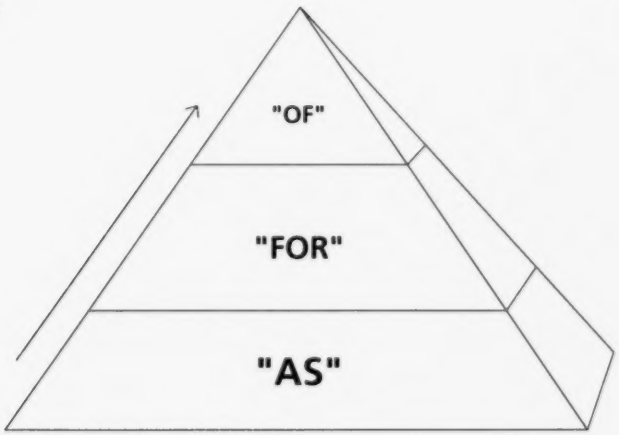

Figure 2: Currently the majority of assessments administered by teachers are assessments of learning. The figure above shows a different approach for learning success. It proposes that the foundation of classroom assessment is formative: assessments "as" and "for" learning.

What is Effective Evaluation?

Assessments that are founded on classroom evaluation standards engage both teachers and learners in a process to discover what learning has occurred and whether the learning is sufficient when evaluated against educational outcomes. Assessments should be designed to be interesting and meaningful. Choosing the right assessment is critical. Teachers need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their assessment choices. As well, employing a variety of appropriate assessments improves the reliability of the evaluation. It can help to improve both learning and instruction.

Assessments must focus on the outcomes of the curriculum. They must probe for the levels of thinking that are addressed by the outcomes. These levels include knowledge and comprehension but also the higher levels of application and evaluation. Assessments for learning take a developmental perspective and track each student's individual growth through the year. Assessments of learning check for a student's achievement against the outcomes. Teachers are encouraged to become familiar with *The Student Evaluation Standards* published by the Joint Committee on Standards for Education Evaluation. This document helps teachers to judge their assessment and evaluation practices against four standards: propriety, utility, feasibility, and accuracy.

Propriety Standards	Propriety standards indicate that students welfare should be of utmost concern in any student evaluation situation. The propriety standards address such issues as serving students learning, student–parents rights, privacy, and access to information.
Utility Standards	Utility standards are designed to serve student learning. The teacher should help those who use student evaluation results make the best possible use of this information to benefit students.
Feasibility Standards	Feasibility standards consider the many environmental factors that can affect the quality of evaluations, such as political factors and time and other resource restraints.
Accuracy Standards	Accuracy standards are essential so student evaluations produce accurate information and that this information is interpreted correctly. Given the array of impoartant decisions that are made based on student evaluation results, accuracy is critical.

What are some Assessment Options for Learning Success?

All students need multiple forms of assessment throughout their school years if they are to collect accurate information about their academic progress (Guskey 1996). Multiple assessment options provide students with many opportunities to demonstrate what they know and are able to do. A solid evaluation program assists students in becoming self-monitoring and self-evaluating, by helping them to take responsibility for their own record keeping and self-reflection.

Performance-Based Assessment

Performance-based assessment involves the direct observation of students as they perform classroom tasks. In addition to conventional tests and written work, such tasks can include the processes and products associated with speeches, debates, videotapes, drama, art, learning fairs, demonstrations, interviews, photo essays, case studies, problem solving, and teamwork. Students are assessed on both their learning process and their finished product. Performance assessment provides more immediate feedback and improves the diagnosis of learning problems and strengths by observing those problems and strengths in context. This form of assessment provides alternative avenues of achievement for those students who do not do well in traditional tests and other written assignments. Performance assessment recognizes and values a wide range of abilities and achievements and is more meaningful for many students.

Rubrics

Rubrics are charts that outline specific criteria and performance levels for assignments and learning activities. They are often used as part of performance assessment, but can also be employed to evaluate projects, research papers, portfolios, and other student work. Rubrics are explicit and developed with students or distributed to students with assignments. They outline the components of the work that will be assessed, the relative weight assigned to different criteria, and describe levels of work, from "incomplete" through "average" to "very good" and "excellent." Rubrics generate important discussions about good work and students' responsibilities. They put students in charge of their own learning and provide clear targets for both student

and teacher assessment of student work. They also provide the opportunity for student input in selecting criteria and setting goals for learning. When students are involved in generating rubrics, they both own and understand assessment.

Portfolios

A portfolio is a representative selection of student work that provides evidence of a wide range of achievements. Portfolios provide a record of growth, thinking, self-evaluation, and goal setting as the student progresses through the school year or throughout his or her high school career. They can represent learning in individual classes, achievement in integrated study units, or growth and learning across disciplines and activities over a four-year period. Portfolios can be used by students in student-led conferences or as part of a senior presentation when a graduation portfolio is a requirement of completing high school. The Nova Scotia Student LifeWork Portfolio is a component in Youth Pathways and Transitions, (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2005)

The portfolio process involves three activities: collection of samples of work, selection of specific items, and reflection on the chosen items and the learning they represent. The collection can include rough and polished work; written, drawn, acted, and illustrated work; individual and collective work samples; as well as audio or video, experiment reports, graphs, narratives, photographs, essays, and poetry. Students may select work for various reasons: best work, examples of growth, displays of genres, artistic merit, demonstration of particular skills.

Student reflection is the most important part of the portfolio process. Students reflect on their selections, their learning, their strengths and weaknesses, and their future goals. Ten percent of the value of portfolios is in the samples, 90 percent of the value is in the reflection.

At Best Practices High School in Chicago, portfolios are used school wide. In each year, students keep a piece of work that represents personal achievement from each subject area. Portfolios are kept with advisory teachers and students write their reflections during advisory at different points over the course of their high school careers. Advisory refers to meetings with teacher advisors. At best teachers meet their 16 or 17 advisors everyday for nearly and hour. At the end of each quarter, students spend a week in advisory reading and

responding to peers' portfolios. Advisory refers to meetings with teacher advisors. At Best Practice, teachers meet with their 16 or 17 advisors, every day for nearly an hour. Portfolios are shared with parents at report card time. At Central Park East Secondary School in Harlem, portfolios are used as a series of final performances required of seniors for graduation. This school has 14 separate portfolio requirements, designed to reflect cumulative knowledge and skill in each subject area—and to demonstrate habits of mind. Each student must make a presentation in four major subjects and three other chosen areas. Passing is upon recommendation of each student's academic advisor and approval of a committee of teachers and outside community members.

Exhibitions and Projects

Exhibitions and projects are designed to simulate real workplace assessment situations. Once students are in the work world, they will be evaluated on the completion, at work, of a range of tasks or projects. Providing high school students with the challenge and opportunity to design and complete exhibitions and projects will prepare them for further stages of learning and, ultimately, for productive teamwork on the job.

Students need to work on projects individually and in teams. While some subjects lend themselves more easily to project work, all students can participate in exhibitions and projects when schools purposefully design integrated study units. Projects and exhibitions are an appropriate assessment method for interdisciplinary study units that simulate the learning conditions of the real world. A number of successful high schools are requiring a senior project and presentation as a requirement for graduation.

Self-Assessment

Self assessment is the most important form of assessment. Ultimately, we want students to be self-directed and self-monitoring individuals who can work independently and produce high-quality work. Self-assessment provides an opportunity for students to examine their own progress to analyse their own strengths and weaknesses, and to plan performance improvements.

Students need to be guided in self-assessment by criteria and outlines provided by their teachers. This coaching promotes student responsibility and independence. Keeping a learning journal, using checklists and

questionnaires, compiling a portfolio with reflections, and using rubrics are four examples of self-assessment. Self-monitoring and self-assessment are at the heart of effective learning. Effective assessment systems give students tools with which to assess their own knowledge and thinking, as well as opportunities to answer reflective questions and to set goals for extending their learning.

Peer Assessment

Using co-operative learning strategies leads naturally to peer assessment. Students can learn much from each other as they respond to each others' work and make suggestions for improvement. Students can give each other feedback on issues as general as participation and contribution, social skills, strengths, and weaknesses or as specific as the style or content of project work, presentations, and research papers or essays. Given the importance of peer approval and the sensitivities of adolescence, peer assessment needs to be carefully structured and thoroughly monitored by teachers. When students engage in constructive peer assessment, they deepen learning by assuming the responsibility of providing supportive feedback and suggestions for others.

Summary: Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment involves students in various demonstrations of their knowledge, skills, attitudes, learning, and growth. Assessment products and events are part of the curriculum, not add-ons or summary activities. They place the responsibility with the students, not the teachers. When we ask students to create a product that shows what they have learned, we tell them that we want them to think, learn content in depth, and demonstrate their learning in a way that is meaningful and useful to them as citizens of the school community. Authentic strategies for assessment give students choices and allow them to demonstrate competencies by doing.

Performance assessments focus on the demonstration of skills and knowledge. Rubrics clearly set criteria and expectations; they allow students to self evaluate, provide guidelines for peer assessment, and give direction for improvement. Portfolios contain significant samples of students' work and meaningful reflections on their learning. Student exhibitions and projects simulate real workplace assessment situations. Self-evaluation is a critical component of authentic assessment that encourages independent learners and

workers. Peer evaluation promotes learning by exposing students to multiple sources of feedback and ideas.

Alternative approaches to assessment enhance instruction by encouraging teachers to teach more deeply about outcomes, methods, and results and promotes a curriculum that aligns educational values, goals, and practices (Darling-Hammond et al. 1995).

Section 4: Organizing for Student Success

In order to increase the opportunities for all students to be successful learners, high schools need to be organized differently from the single, inflexible organizational structure that has characterized schools in the past. In many high schools structural time continues to be organized into seven or eight 50-minute periods. All subjects, all students, and all courses are allocated the same amount of time regardless of level of difficulty, class size, students' abilities, or nature of the subject matter. We know that all students *can* learn, given alternative learning opportunities, varying periods in which to learn, and various options for demonstrating what they know and can do. However, many high schools persist with a traditional schedule and rigid administrative policies that disadvantage many students. More students become successful learners when schools are organized to increase scheduling flexibility and course options.

This chapter first returns to the issues of size and personalization by discussing various practical arrangements of people, programs, and policies that encourage smaller school environments. It then proposes alternative scheduling arrangements, including block scheduling; the Copernican Model; the trimester model; a hybrid schedule; and creating time for enrichment and remediation. The chapter also describes the importance of organizing time and structures for teacher learning. There is an urgent need for high schools to restructure to establish the flexibility and variety of program that will increase learning success for all students.

Restructuring to Personalize High Schools

There are different approaches to making big schools feel small. Some schools create schools-within-the-school by breaking a large school into families of 100 to 250 students. These smaller groupings facilitate better relationships between students and staff (National Association of Secondary School Principals 1996). These smaller groupings facilitate better relationships between students and staff (MacPaitland and Jordan, National Association of Secondary School Principals). Another similar approach is that of learning academies. Encina High School in Sacramento organized their 1000 students into five separate learning academies, each focussed on a career cluster (health, business, fine arts, government, trades). The restructuring produced a sharp rise in attendance and performance.

Flexible groupings of students also allow teachers to address individual student needs. At Monticello High School in Charlottesville, VA, students' progress is tracked on a six-week time frame. Students who have mastered the knowledge and competencies move on to the next level; those who have not continue working until they reach mastery. Students are regrouped many times during the year to accommodate learning needs and progress. Reorganization for more personalization creates a greater sense of belonging. Membership and belonging have a greater impact on achievement for traditionally underserved students, especially minority youngsters and underachieving students (Cawelti 1997; Gaziel 1997; Wehlage et al. 1999).

Block Scheduling

Block scheduling means organizing longer blocks of time (from 80 to 100 minutes) each day for a limited number of courses. Most high schools in Nova Scotia use block scheduling. Proponents of block scheduling argue that the traditional high school schedule creates an impersonal environment that is characterized by an "assembly-line, single-period daily schedule" and that disciplinary problems are often associated with multiple class transitions during the day (Canady and Rettig 1996). Although there are several modifications of block scheduling, almost all represent some variation on two basic schemes.

The first form, called the alternative day schedule, is also referred to as the A/B or Day 1/Day 2 format. Essentially, there are six, seven, or eight periods in the schedule. In this format, students meet every other day for extended blocks of time in fewer courses; students attend half of their classes on day one and half of their classes on day two.

The second basic block format is the four-by-four schedule, which is often associated with semestering. In 4/4 block scheduling, there are four instructional blocks during the day. Students take four courses one semester, and three or four courses the next semester. Each course meets for 90 minutes, over a 90- to100-day semester. Students can earn eight credits a year and thus accumulate 24 credits during high school.

The key to successful implementation of block scheduling is sustained staff development. Most teachers in block-scheduled schools plan lessons that include at least three different activities per block.

The advantages and disadvantages of the two alternative block scheduling formats are summarized by Canady and Rettig (2000). While inquiry into the effects of high school block scheduling is still in its infancy, research on block scheduling is producing very promising results. After two or more years, block scheduling becomes more effective than traditional scheduling. Initially, there is greater stress for teachers while they learn how to plan and teach in a larger block of time, but the school eventually becomes less stressful for both students and teachers.

Block scheduling also has a positive effect on school discipline. There is evidence that the number of discipline referrals to office is reduced by 25 percent to 35 percent (Canady and Rettig 2000). There is also consistent evidence that students' grades, as reported by grade point average, increase under the new scheduling regimen. Failure rates in 4/4 block schools decline, and some students labelled at risk are more likely to stay in school (Gore 1996). Students in longer, block-scheduled classes have a higher engagement rate than students in the shorter, traditional schedule (Freeman, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement 2001).

Other Scheduling Options

Two other scheduling options adopted by some high schools are the Copernican Model and the trimester model. The Copernican model, derived from highly intensive summer school programs, divides the year into three, 60-day segments, during which students take a few, concentrated courses. In the trimester model, students take five courses each in two 75 day sessions, followed by a 30-day spring trimester designed for intensive study of one or two subjects—or making up lost credits.

Best Practices High School in Chicago has a hybrid schedule with a number of different organizational configurations throughout the year. During the first six weeks of the school year students and teachers follow a traditional high school schedule (eight-50 minute periods). For 24 weeks of the year the school has a hybrid schedule (Monday and Tuesday follow a traditional high school schedule; Tuesday and Thursday follow a block schedule with double classes in all courses; and on Wednesday all students participate in a half day internship and "choices" for half a day). Furthermore, for 8–10 weeks of the year, students participate in interdisciplinary units of study. Four times during the year at each grade level, regular classes are suspended and students are involved in integrated units for two weeks. This hybrid schedule provides variety for both students and teachers during the week and throughout the year.

Enrichment and Remediation

At Monticello High School in Charlottesville, VA, enrichment and remediation are scheduled into the timetable every day as Mustang Morning. This period allows ongoing monitoring and support; students who are struggling or falling behind have daily opportunities to get help, while others use this time to pursue special interests and to work on self-directed projects. Groupings for enrichment and remediation change with student needs and interests throughout the year. Having this time scheduled gives the school flexibility to address diverse abilities and needs amongst its 1000 students (Monticello High School website 2007).

Pathways to Success

In order to increase learning success for all students, the Rochester (NY) City School District has created the Pathways Initiative, which allows students to earn a diploma in three, four, or five years (Janey 2000). They recognize that students need varying lengths of time for achieving high standards of performance; some require more time to demonstrate their knowledge and competence, and some less.

The five-year program allows students more time to focus and to succeed. Students can be scheduled for double periods in subjects in which their academic need is greatest. The three-year program, on the other hand, recognizes that some students require less time to reach high standards and complete their graduation requirements. Students who finish early can go on to college; remain in high school for enrichment programs, or take advance placement courses in the fourth year. Both programs offer summer courses using a trimester schedule similar to the school calendar at many colleges.

Time for Teacher Learning

High schools focussed on increasing learning success for all students, are also focussed on teacher professional development. They create and protect time for teacher learning; they organize schedules, timetables, and school structures to ensure that teachers are working together on student work and continuing to learn about curriculum, teaching, and assessment.

Internships at Best Practices High School in Chicago and *community service* at Central Park East Secondary School in Harlem provide planning time for teachers every week. Grade level teams meet every Wednesday at both schools, while students are involved in internships or community service projects that amplify their learning.

Organizing teachers in teams allows for more flexibility. Teams can be scheduled to have common planning periods, and sometimes one teacher can work with two classes simultaneously, freeing up the second teacher for learning or planning. Other principals *purchase time* by hiring once a month a substitute who rotates through several teachers' classes over the course of the day. This allows teachers to observe one another and to team teach.

At Freemont High School in California, teachers meet on Fridays from 7:30 to 9:00 to talk about redesigning the school. Late Start Fridays provide regular, ongoing time teachers need to focus on improving instruction, assessment, standards, literacy, and community involvement. *PD Tuesdays* are part of the schedule of Eastdale Collegiate Vocational Institute in the Durham Board of Education just outside of Toronto. Every Tuesday, teachers meet for an hour and a half at the end of the day for collaborative work. One Tuesday each month is for a staff meeting, the second Tuesday is for department planning, the third Tuesday is for study groups, and the fourth Tuesday is for school-wide staff development sessions.

Section 5: Communicating

Productive secondary schools communicate clearly, regularly, effectively, and efficiently with students and staff inside the school and with parents and the community outside the school. Everyone needs clearly to understand priorities (expectations), programs, policies, procedures, possibilities, and performance (student and school). Many problems in high schools can be traced back to a breakdown in communication. Effective schools use and are receptive to implementing a variety of strategies to keep people informed, involved, and interested.

Parents, students, teachers, and administrators need to work together to ensure ongoing communication about student learning, progress, behaviour, attendance, and potential. Student portfolios and personal progress plans are two useful strategies for communicating about student work. A variety of other strategies can be used to foster ongoing communication between the school and parents. Finally, a school advisory council and a school annual report are two formal mechanisms that promote in the school community effective communication about overall school goals, direction, and progress.

Personal Progress Plans

Each student should have a personal progress plan to ensure that the high school takes individual needs into consideration and to encourage students, within reasonable parameters, to design their own learning. Students, parents, and teachers all participate in developing personal progress plans. The planning group identifies learning goals and continually re-evaluates them. Students meet periodically with a teacher advisor to review progress, to assemble evidence of achievement, and to refocus their goals and learning activities. In some schools, students include documentation of their community service and their achievements at school as part of their personal

progress plans. At the end of each year, students and their advisors prepare a reflective report on individual learning and development. Over time, students build a record of achievements and accomplishments. A personal plan contributes to student personalization and helps students to develop planning, decision making, and monitoring skills.

Nova Scotia Student LifeWork Portfolios

The Nova Scotia Student LifeWork Portfolio implemented in grade 7 in September, 2006 is a collection of purposefully selected items that students gather throughout their years in secondary school to illustrate their growth and achievements both within the school and beyond. The portfolio is designed as a guiding link connecting a student's academic experiences to the world of work and lifelong learning. The portfolio tells a story about the student's developmental growth, achievements, and progress over time. It serves as a window on learning, enabling a student to display a rich array of work samples that provide evidence of learning and accomplishments.

LifeWork portfolios are used in a variety of ways. Some teachers use them at student conference time as a focus and a tool for discussing the student's progress with parents. Some students use items from their portfolios when applying for work or community placement, seeking admission to an educational institution, or seeking employment. Some schools require that students assemble a final portfolio for presentation as a year-end culminating assignment. For example, assembly and presentation of a 14-part portfolio is a requirement for graduation for each student at Central Park East Secondary School in Harlem (Darling-Hammond, et al. 1997; Meier 1995).

School–Home Communication Strategies

Successful secondary schools have multiple strategies for ensuring two-way communication between school and home. Some schools organize systematically to make positive contacts with students' homes; they send positive postcards and make phone calls acknowledging students' progress and contributions. Some schools regularly send recognition certificates home

commending students for a range of accomplishments. Some schools hand deliver report cards to parents of students with failing grades and make home visits. Some schools have a parent liaison committee for contacting parents and encouraging their participation in student learning.

Many schools communicate with parents by using a student agenda, while others publish regular school newsletters. Some schools prepare information for parents as a series of fact sheets that outline different policies, procedures, and practices. These are available at reporting times and during school events. Other schools write regular items for a school column in the local newspaper. More schools are using sign boards outside the school, while some distribute monthly calendars identifying events and key dates. Schools survey parents on school changes and improvements on a regular basis; others organize parent nights and town hall meetings. Not all these strategies are appropriate in every context, but some combination of them will form the basis of effective home-school communication for every high school.

School Advisory Councils

School advisory councils (SACs) bring educational partners together to make decisions and solve problems in the best interest of student learning. In Nova Scotia, the SAC is a legally recognized body, made up of the principal and representative teachers, support staff, students, parents, and community members. Together, they work to increase the quality of education being provided by the school. Members of the council participate in planning school improvement strategies, advise on school policies and practices, and report on student and school success. The SAC encourages positive relationships among the school, family, and community. Effective SACs are involved not only with school improvement, but also with other activities, including being a part of the hiring of principals, working with parent volunteers, promoting community involvement, establishing partnerships with business, organizing fundraising, and sponsoring family evenings.

School Improvement Plans

The school improvement plan is developed by the school staff working with the school advisory council. The school improvement plan communicates the school's priorities and plans for continuous improvement. Some schools regularly survey parents to solicit their input into decisions about programs, policies, procedures, and problems. This information contributes to the school assessment component of the school planning process. A school improvement plan should outline the school's vision and value system, its common goals, action plans for addressing those goals, professional development priorities and plans, tracking and evaluation plans, and overall implementation targets. School improvement plans are generally for three to four years and should be reviewed annually by both the staff and school advisory council.

School Annual Reports

Each high school should report annually to its community, concerning its school improvement goals and achievements. The school advisory council is typically responsible for preparing the school annual report. School annual reports should provide descriptions of programs and activities, as well as information on student performance and school accomplishments. It is important to report how the school as a whole fares, by providing an achievement profile for the entire student body. Depending on their particular school improvement plans, schools may choose to report on different aspects of school life, including

- average attendance
- teacher absenteeism
- student turnovers
- local and provincial assessment results
- expenditures
- drop-out and graduation rates
- student participation in co-curricular activities
- graduation follow-up information
- progress on school improvement goals

School annual reports should be short, concise, and readily available to the school community. Each school advisory council should consider an oral presentation of its annual report at the end or the beginning of the school year, and the school office should always have copies of the current report on hand.

Summary

Successful high schools are open and transparent in their communications within the school and with parents and community partners. They provide accurate and timely information on programs, policies, practices, and priorities. They invite parents into the school physically to support and discuss student learning. They encourage students, teachers, and parents to make suggestions and to solve problems.

Section 6: Managing Transitions

Transitions are always difficult, but few are so difficult for teenagers as starting at a new high school. To ease this transition, an exemplary high school deliberately orients new students and their families to the school and its culture. Successful high schools also organize activities and strategies throughout the high school years to facilitate transitions from grade to grade and from year to year. In addition, they assist students with their transition from high school to post-secondary education institutions, other learning opportunities, the world of work, and community living.

Transition and orientation practices are meant to promote in students an understanding of the purposes, goals, and outcomes of schooling that are shared by parents, students, educators, involved agencies, and the public. This chapter presents a number of strategies for managing the multiple transitions students and their families face during the high school years—first from junior high school to high school, then during the high school years from grade to grade and from year to year, and finally, from high school to further learning or the workplace.

Orientation and Transition to High School

Research (Pierson 1996) has shown that when schools implement transition programs, new students have fewer failing grades, fewer discipline referrals, fewer suspensions, fewer absences, and more positive attitudes towards school. During the transition and orientation period, all high schools should make all students and parents aware of graduation requirements and involve each student in developing a multi-year program plan. It is also important that the school should clearly explain all school programs, options, and services.

A range of strategies can be used to orient students and their families to high school. Some high schools have teams of their students go to meet with small groups of students at junior high feeder schools. Many schools organize an orientation day that involves pairing new students with current high school students to experience a day in high school. Other schools prepare orientation kits and hold information sessions for parents to outline expectations, policies, and programs and to answer questions. Schools that have a teacher advisory system usually work with new students on team building, study and organizational skills, program planning, portfolios, school policies, and problem solving.

Beginning of School Community Building Week

Waterloo Collegiate Institute in Waterloo, Ontario, starts school each year with a community building week, organized by the staff and students' council, to manage the transition back into a new school year. During the first week of school, students meet daily in their teacher advisory groups, attend workshops on a variety of topics, participate in team building and school spirit activities, and work through a mini-version of their schedule. Teachers build relationships with their student advisees, provide an overview of their courses, and teach students one of their best lessons to capture their interest. They conduct workshops on study skills, conflict management, learning styles, the research process, critical and creative thinking strategies, managing change, and other topics identified by students. Both staff and students participate in schoolwide community building activities. This approach to beginning a new year provides time for some students to spend extended sessions with guidance counsellors and for everyone to refocus from a summer holiday mind-set to active learning.

End-of-School Activities

Activities that mark the end of each year of high school are also part of a comprehensive transition and orientation program. Most high schools have well established traditions for the students who are graduating. In addition, some high schools have a set of activities that summarize, celebrate, and recognize the completion of the other years as well, including portfolio presentations, reflection writings, résumé preparation and updates, letters of appreciation, and goal setting. Field trips, fun nights, group skits, roasts, and teacher award ceremonies organized by students also contribute to school spirit and bring closure to each year of learning.

Changing Policies, Practices, and Programs

Successful high schools have a systematic process for changing policies, practices, and programs in accordance with their improvement plans. They consult teachers, students, and parents directly in making transitions. They may hold information nights, organize town hall meetings, distribute information in writing, survey parents; or conduct focus groups. School administrations provide information, answer questions, and adopt a problem-solving orientation. By these means, they manage transitions by being open and transparent.

Having a formal process for managing organizational transitions helps students, teachers, and parents to remain focussed on learning while taking an active role in determining school directions.

Transitions Beyond High School

Job Search Skills

Whether students choose to continue their formal education, enter the workforce full time, or learn through travel and pursuing adventures, all will benefit from developing job search skills. Interest inventories and self-assessments of strengths and weaknesses help students realize their career preferences and identify potential jobs that match their skill sets. Learning to write résumés and cover letters is also useful, as is the proper completion of application forms and systematic job search planning. Interviewing skills are best learned from participating in and critiquing mock interviews. Finally, compiling work samples in a LifeWork Portfolio will also be important for some future endeavours. This programming is integral of both the LifeWork Portfolio and Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling.

Preparing for Post-Graduation Options

Successful high schools also support and assist students in choosing post-graduation options, such as continuing learning opportunities, career options, work placements, volunteer service, and other possibilities. Some schools have guidance staff meet formally with each grade 12 student in September, in January, and in May during their final year to talk about post-graduation plans. Many students choose to continue formal learning at university or community college. Arranging for visits from institutional representatives to discuss requirements and choices allows students to consider their options

in greater detail. Former students also return to some schools, so that they may explain and discuss with graduating classes post-secondary educational expectations and opportunities.

Other students choose to enter the work force immediately upon graduation. Many schools routinely organize career days and job fairs that expose students to various career possibilities. Internships and job shadowing are two other strategies for orienting students to workplace expectations and realities. Organizing a lunch hour career series that features presentations by representatives of different occupations is another way of introducing options to students. Reviewing workplace skills (Conference Board of Canada 2000) with students will prepare students as well.

Summary

When high school plays a vital role in the personal development of young people as social beings, it becomes a transition experience, preparing each student for the next stage of life. High school must continue to provide a foundation for good citizenship and full participation in a democracy. It must prepare its students to be lifelong learners. It must enable its graduates to participate comfortably in an increasingly technological society. When high schools organize a range and variety of transition activities for every stage in a student's high school career, they become gateways, offering their graduates multiple avenues to self-awareness and independence.

Section 7: Partnerships and Relationships

Successful high schools become extended communities, engaging the larger society around them in support of student learning and school success. Parents, interested citizens, businesses, and community organizations can all participate; strong schools reach out and actively recruit and organize the human resources of their communities in order to meet the needs of all students. Such schools organize learning opportunities in both the school and in the community. Parents and community members "come in" to the school to assist and to share their expertise and students "go out" into the community to participate in service and learning.

Guidelines for Successful Partnerships

Successful secondary schools have criteria, guidelines, and procedures for establishing community alliances. Epstein (2001) and White, Taylor, and Moss (1992) proposes interesting ideas to guide schools in forging partnerships and alliances. Joyce Epstein (1995) summarizes as follows two decades of research on home-school-community partnerships for student learning:

- Partnerships tend to decline across the grades *unless* schools and teachers develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at the school level.
- Affluent communities currently have more positive family involvement, on average, unless schools and teachers in more economically distressed communities actively build positive relationships with their students' families.
- Schools in more economically depressed neighbourhoods and communities make more contact with families about the problems and difficulties their children are having, unless they consciously develop

balanced partnership programs that include positive contacts about the accomplishments of students.

- Single parents, parents who are employed outside the home, parents who live far from school, and fathers are less involved, on average, at the school building *unless* the school organizes opportunities for families to volunteer in support of the school and their children at various times and in various places that match their availability.
- Most families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children's education.
- Most teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to build positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful about trying.
- Most students at all levels, from primary to senior high, want their families to be more knowledgeable partners in their schooling and are willing to actively assist communications between home and the school.

Epstein (1995) provides a framework for thinking about and organizing school-family-community partnerships—"six types of involvement" needed to ensure support for students in our schools.

- **Parent learning:** Schools need to help parents learn how to establish home environments that support learning. They can do this by organizing workshops and meetings that explain to parents such topics as adolescent development, curriculum outcomes, instructional strategies, brain research, new assessment approaches, drug and alcohol abuse, or changes in school policies and procedures.
- **School–home communication:** Schools need to engage in effective, two-way communication between themselves and homes to improve each family's understanding about school programs and student progress (see sections on communication).
- **School volunteers:** Schools need to recruit and organize parent and community support. Getting parents "inside" the building to assist with learning is essential to meeting the diverse needs of students.
- **Extending learning:** Schools need to support families in helping students with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.
- **Decision making:** Schools should include parents and community members in advisory, decision-making, and advocacy roles in schools. Doing so encourages their support and assists in developing their leadership skills.

- **Collaborating with the community:** Schools need to identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning. By involving the community and its organizations and institutions, more people share responsibility for greater student development.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1994) asserts that, to be effective, learning partnerships must benefit both partners. She suggests that effective alliances and partnerships have eight characteristics:

1. **Individual excellence:** Partners are strong and have something to contribute to the partnership.
2. **Importance:** Partners have a stake in the goal; the alliance is important to both partners.
3. **Interdependence:** Partners need each other.
4. **Investment:** Partners are prepared to invest in the relationship and each other.
5. **Information:** Partners share information to make the relationship work.
6. **Integration:** Partners develop shared ways of operating so they can work together.
7. **Institutionalization:** The relationship is given formal status, with clear responsibilities and decision-making processes.
8. **Integrity:** Partners behave toward each other in honourable ways to enhance mutual trust.

Volunteering in the School

Parents and community members can contribute to school life as volunteers, resource people, and mentors. When schools formally organize volunteer programs, the possibilities for positive interaction and clarity increase. Schools need to address the following tasks in organizing for parents and community members to "come in" to their facilities:

- designating a volunteer co-ordinator
- developing guidelines for volunteers/resource people, including a successful police record inquiry

- surveying parents on talents, skills, and expertise
- surveying teachers on tasks and activities required
- organizing volunteer name tags and sign-in procedure
- contacting parents for specific tasks/activities
- organizing a volunteer recognition system

Parents and community members are valuable as resource people who participate actively in the academic agenda of the school. Some individuals make presentations in a specific subject area to several classes; some conduct workshops on a career day; some contribute time to provide professional development for staff members; others provide important resource materials (books, equipment) to support a particular program; and still others serve as student tutors or mentors.

Parents and community volunteer support is necessary for a variety of activities; to coach teams, to organize fundraising, to help with fine arts productions, to assist with events at school, to chaperone field trips, to help with the "in-school" homework helper program, to participate in exchange trips, or to serve on school improvement committees. Some volunteers can assist regularly, once a week or once a month; others contribute to one particular event during the year.

Working and Learning "Outside the School"

Extending learning experiences "outside of school" requires partnerships with businesses, industry, community organizations, and government departments. Experiences beyond the walls of the school provide connections and linkages between school knowledge and the realities of the working world. They provide for students real-life experiences that are relevant and meaningful, at locations such as museums, senior citizen facilities, businesses, industries, hospitals, day cares or preschools, social service agencies, and non-profit organizations. Field trips, community projects, and service learning programs are three types of activity that involve students learning "outside the school."

Many schools organize field trips and use off-campus resources to complement classroom studies, thereby adding real-world relevance to the in-school curriculum. Some schools have a systematic set of field trips and experiences (including an exchange during one year) at each grade level, so that all students have opportunities for learning outside the school. School

exchanges and school trips are traditions in many schools that students anticipate with excitement and curiosity.

Some teachers routinely assign projects that require students to research outside the classroom and the school. Other teachers have students design an in-school project and then take it out to the community.

By actively participating in the school community and school events, students learn about citizenship. They also learn citizenship by participating in service learning programs. Service learning contributes to the community the time and energy of its young people, while helping them reflect on what they learn from their participation. Some schools and provinces require a specific number of hours of community service as a condition of graduation.

Community service programs are generally extended experiences, not one-time visits. They are often integrated with a unit of study in the classroom. In the various organizations and agencies that make up the fabric and infrastructure of a community, students can work with children, with sick people, with community organizers, with disabled people, with seniors, and with the homeless. Through community service programs, students serve to learn and learn to serve.

School-to-Work Transition Programs

School-to-work transition activities can include job shadowing, career days, student mentor programs, work-study terms, co-operative education programs, internships, and apprenticeships. One-day job shadowing and career days give students exposure to a range of job opportunities. Student mentoring programs, work-study terms, co-operative education programs, internships, and apprenticeships provide the opportunity to experience workplace expectations and to explore one field of work in greater depth. Some schools offer courses that have a work placement component; other schools have formal school-to-work transition programs in which each student in the school participates in a series of work placements over the high school years.

Students at Best Practices High School in Chicago participate in half-day internships every Wednesday for 24 weeks during the school year. The school has a full-time internship co-ordinator who finds approximately 70

sites and organizes a program for all students in the school. Representatives from the sites participate in a job fair each September. They prepare one-page information sheets on their sites and their jobs. Students write formal applications to their first five choices, in which they explain their skills and write persuasive arguments for the internship. During advisory, students keep journals about their internship experiences. At the end of the internship, advisees write a summary report, prepare a résumé, and design a personal brochure on a computer. Both students and site supervisors complete evaluation forms, and students receive a grade for the internship.

Summary

School doors must open both ways: students should be out in the community and the community should be brought into the school. To promote student learning, schools need to form partnerships and relationships with parents, business, and community organizations, with other schools, and with universities and colleges. Students need opportunities to learn outside the walls of their schools. They benefit in many ways from internships, community service, job shadowing, and visits to community facilities, such as museums, hospitals, day cares, and seniors centres. Schools need to provide a range and variety of experiences that facilitate the transition of their students into the world of work beyond high school.

Section 8: Professional Development

Every high school should be a learning community for staff as well as for students. Professional improvement connects with the growth of students. When teachers are learning together, all students learn more and are themselves more willing to collaborate. Professional development must address both individual and collective needs in the school community of learners. It should be organized around the goals of the school and school board implementation of provincial curriculum and the continuous pursuit of implementing successful practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Changing traditional practices in high schools requires new conceptions of teacher learning. Teachers need time to rethink and expand their instructional and assessment repertoires. They need to see good teaching and share ideas for increasing learning success for all students. Opportunities for teacher learning need to be frequent, diverse, ongoing, and, most importantly, embedded in the daily teaching routine. Many strategies for professional development should be available for building a professional learning community.

This chapter starts with a discussion of the characteristics of effective professional development. It proceeds by describing several strategies for promoting continuous teacher growth and development. Then, it links professional standards, teacher learning, teacher evaluation, and school improvement. Finally, the chapter summarizes conditions necessary for developing individual and collective capacity.

Effective Professional Development

Professional development needs to focus on both individual and organizational development. Building individual capacity is one central and appropriate focus of professional development (Darling-Hammond 2000; Fullan 2001). The knowledge and skill of teachers is an important influence on student achievement (Darling-Hammond 2000). Yet, individual teacher learning is not enough; teachers must work together within a particular school context (King and Newmann 2000). Professional development needs to focus on developing the whole school's capacity for change and improvement as well. Collective and organizational development is proving to be more powerful than isolated individual development. Schools that are changing for the better have developed into professional learning communities (MacLaughlin and Talbert 2001; Newmann, King, and Youngs 2000), in which the collective capacity contributes to the growth of the school as a whole.

Several researchers have described the components of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond 1995; Elmore and Burney 1999; Fullan 2001; Lieberman 1995; Sparks and Hirsh 1997). Successful professional development

- focusses on classroom practice and school improvement, with ongoing follow-up
- exposes teachers to actual practice rather than just descriptions of practice
- offers opportunities for observation, critique, and reflection
- provides opportunities for group support and collaboration
- involves evaluation and feedback by skilled practitioners

To be successful, professional learning requires active involvement that is sustained over time. It also requires that teachers focus on teaching and learning in their own classrooms and schools. It further demands that teachers broaden their horizons beyond the classroom and even beyond the school, not looking to outside expertise for ready-made answers, but rather as sources of ideas and innovative practice (Fullan 2001).

Learning for teachers must have the same characteristics we expect for student learning. It needs to be learner-centred, challenging, authentic, and collaborative. The most effective staff development programs are voluntary, peer-led, focussed on curriculum and instruction, lengthy (that is, ongoing),

active, practical, and supported by the principal. Frequent, on-the-job dialogue about instruction is key. Teachers need to talk with colleagues on a regular basis about student learning, instruction, and assessment. Teachers need to work together, sharing what they learn in their classrooms to help one another learn.

Sparks and Hirsch (1997) summarize the major shifts in staff development over the past decade:

- from individual development to a combination of individual development and organizational development
- from fragmented, piecemeal improvement efforts to professional development driven by a clear, coherent strategic plan for the district and by the school improvement plan
- from district-focused to school-focused approaches to staff development
- from a focus on adult needs and satisfaction to a focus on student needs and learning outcomes and on changes in on-the-job behaviours
- from training conducted away from the job as the primary delivery system for staff development to multiple forms of job-embedded learning
- from an orientation toward the transmission of knowledge and skills to teachers by "experts" to the study by teachers of the teaching and learning processes
- from staff developers who function primarily as trainers to those who provide consultation, planning, and facilitation services as well as training
- from staff development provided by one or two departments to staff development as a critical function and major responsibility of all administrators and teacher leaders
- from staff development as a "frill" that can be cut during difficult financial times to staff development as an indispensable process, without which schools cannot hope to prepare young people for citizenship and productive employment

An even greater challenge, however, is that collective capacity should go wider than the walls of the school; the use of professional development as a mechanism for the implementation of educational reform requires a system-wide view. Both local school development and the quality of the surrounding infrastructure are critical for lasting success. Somehow, professional development programs must balance the building of individual and school capacity with system-wide and provincial reform objectives (Watson, Fullan, and Kilcher 2000).

Different Forms of Professional Development

Traditionally, people think of workshops and conferences when they think of professional development. While these strategies cannot be discounted, job-embedded professional development activities and strategies pay higher dividends. Job embedded professional development links learning to the immediate and real-life problems faced by teachers and administrators. It is based on the assumption that the most powerful learning is that which occurs in response to current challenges and allows for immediate application, experimentation, and adaptation on the job. A range of strategies and approaches can facilitate continuous learning on the job: action research, study or learning groups, critical friends groups, school and classroom visitations, grade level planning meeting, interdisciplinary study units, and recommended online professional development resources and journal writing. This range of strategies and approaches involve groups of teachers coming together professionally on a regular basis as professional learning communities. Studies on promoting and sustaining professional learning communities in education have taken place in both North America (Bryk et al. 1999; Kruse et al. 1994; Hord, 1997) and England (Bolan et al. 2005).

Action Research

Action research brings eight groups of teachers together to study different aspects of classroom practice, to use the data for changing classroom practices, and to share their research with other teachers. Hannay (1998) describes four steps involved in action research: discussing what action research is, deciding how to do action research and defining action research questions, collecting information on the research questions and sharing progress, and reporting on results. Teachers then adapt their teaching practices based on what they learn from investigating some aspect of their teaching or assessment. Teachers learn from listening, collaborating, and critiquing each other's work. Sagor (1997), Calhoun (1994), and Hopkins (1999) provide clear direction for teachers and schools interested in pursuing action research.

Study or Learning Groups

Study or learning groups offer another strategy that helps teachers to collaborate and reflect on their instruction, assessment, and management practices, as well as on their values and attitudes. Study groups involve six to eight teachers who make a commitment to learn together. Group members

read articles or book chapters and come together to teach each other or to discuss their learnings together. Study groups meet regularly, once or twice a month. Some school staffs break into study groups and collectively work through selected books on instruction or assessment. Study groups provide a focus, as well as both pressure and support, for implementing changes in classroom practices.

Critical Friends Groups

Critical Friends Groups, or CFGs as they are called, gained widespread popularity in the '90s through the Annenburg Foundation funding for school reform in the United States. CFGs bring small groups of teachers together to discuss student work. Each CFG has a coach who has participated in a week-long training course on using protocols to structure teachers' discussions. CFG groups meet once a month for two hours. Teachers bring samples of students' work for discussion. The coach facilitates the critique and examination of student work using structured protocols. Group members come away with new ways of thinking about student work and strategies for changing classroom practice.

School And Classroom Visits

School and classroom visits bring teachers and administrators in contact with exemplary practice. Teachers consistently report that they learn the most from other practitioners. Seeing other teachers "in action"—and observing how other schools organize—fuels teachers with ideas and energy. Elmore and Burney (1999) documented that teachers in New York District 2 routinely visited other colleagues' classrooms to observe teaching. Some schools hire a substitute on a regular basis to rotate from classroom to classroom, thus freeing teachers to observe their colleagues; in other schools teachers commit one planning period a month to visiting other colleagues' classrooms in the school.

Grade Level Planning Meetings

Grade level planning meetings provide teachers with the opportunity to discuss common curriculum outcomes, to share instructional strategies, and to co-ordinate assignments and assessment strategies. A number of high schools schedule grade-level meetings into their timetables as a way of ensuring coherence and continuity for students. Some schools schedule common planning time; some ensure that teachers are scheduled for the same lunch hour; other schools allocate time on a quarterly or trimester basis for

teachers to plan together. Grade-level meetings provide the opportunity for teachers to plan a co-ordinated program of studies for students.

Interdisciplinary Study Units

Organizing and implementing interdisciplinary study units is another activity that embeds learning and planning into the daily routine of teachers. This requires teachers to co-ordinate student learning across disciplines. It provides a purpose and a structure for examining their respective disciplines in a new way. Working through the connections and linkages between disciplines helps teachers to understand curriculum outcomes and to consider a range of learning opportunities by means of which students may explore the many dimensions of a theme or issue.

Journal Writing

Educators are always pressed for time; reflection is rare and often ignored unless strategies and structures are in place to allow teachers time for rethinking approaches and strategies. Journal writing and regular reflection meetings provide another opportunity for teachers to learn. At Monticello High School in Charlottesville, VA, for example, teachers meet three times a year with the principal to reflect on their teaching and to discuss student learning and results. The principal encourages teachers to keep learning journals of their success, failures, and learnings.

Nova Scotia Online Professional Development Resources

Nova Scotia universities, the Nova Scotia Teacher's Union, school boards, and the Department of Education have developed and continue to develop tailored professional development materials and resources for online, just-in- time use by individuals and groups of teachers. Go to http://lrt.EDnet.ns.ca to explore professional resources assessed and developed for the Nova Scotia context.

Retreats And Summer Institutes

Retreats and summer institutes also afford staff time to step back and look at the big picture of their school to assess programs, practices, policies, procedures, and possibilities. These extended meetings together, outside of school, also allow teachers to think about students and discuss their work; they provide concentrated blocks of time for reflection, review, and renewal as a team. Best Practices High School staff meet twice a year as a group to discuss teaching practices and students' learning, for five days in the summer and for a weekend in January. Nova Scotia has an amazing assortment of opportunities

available. An annual publication, *Summer Learning Opportunities for Teachers,* provides information on a wide array of summer institutes.

Linking Professional Standards, Learning, and Evaluation

Professional development is most powerful when it is connected to standards of best teaching practice and to the teacher evaluation system. When individual teachers have personal learning plans that are linked to the school's professional development plan, the whole school moves forward, and tenets of best teaching practice become implemented in all classrooms.

In the last decade, standards of quality teaching have been defined by different groups (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards 1993; Ontario College of Teachers 1999). The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards (NBPTS) in the United States has developed standards and assessment procedures in 30 subject matter disciplines, organized around five major propositions:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring students' learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

Results from early studies (Bond, Smith, and Hattie 2000) are encouraging. Teachers who are certified by NBPTS report that they improved their practice as they pushed to meet specific standards. They find that the process of analysing their work and their students' work enhances their abilities to assess student learning. At Monticello High School, eight standards of teaching are used to guide teacher professional development and evaluation. At Best Practices High School, teachers have defined 13 principles that guide instruction and assessment across the school.

Each teacher should have an individual professional development plan or personal learning plan (PLP) that addresses his or her need to grow, stressing knowledge and skills related to student learning. Individual professional development plans outline goals, learning strategies, time lines, resources, and expected results. A PLP facilitates self-appraisal by teachers and gives

direction over a number of years to track a teacher's learning. PLPs facilitate discussions with other teachers and focus teachers' growth and improvement in a systematic way.

Teacher portfolios are increasingly being used as part of teacher assessment and evaluation (Painter 2001). A teacher portfolio is a collection of assignments, notes, lesson plans, student work, evaluations, artifacts, and reflections. It is a documented history of a teacher's learning process and growth over time. Teacher portfolios are usually measured against a set of teaching standards. Collection, selection, and reflection are the three major processes involved in compiling and presenting one's portfolio.

High schools should have a school professional development plan connected to the school improvement plan. Common priorities and goals defined in the school improvement plan guide the collective learning of staff. Plans for professional development must combine bottom-up and top-down strategies, so that programs have both local ownership and strong links to local needs on the one hand and a clear connection with system-wide and provincial reforms on the other. When there is a school plan for professional learning, all teachers are focussed on continuously improving instruction and assessment.

Summary: Supportive Conditions for Teacher Learning

The teaching profession must become a better learning profession. Schools need to be organized for integrating learning and teaching on the job. Teacher learning must be a central and crucial part of the fabric of all high schools. Teachers need access to other colleagues and information resources to learn. Teachers need to be experimenting—constantly testing, refining, and processing feedback on the improvements they make.

Leaders must create conditions that value learning as an individual and collective goal. School leaders must organize time, space, and resources to ensure teacher learning. The school must encourage risk taking and experimentation. Leaders must create environments in which individuals expect that their personal ideas and practices will be subject to the scrutiny of their colleague, and in which groups expect to have their shared conceptions of practice subject to the scrutiny of individuals. Privacy of practice produces isolation; isolation is the enemy of improvement (Elmore and Burney 1999). Balancing pressure (accountability) and support (capacity building) is key to ongoing teacher learning.

Section 9: Enhancing Student Engagement at Barrington Municipal High School

Tri-County Regional School Board

Background

"Schools exist within their cultures and times. To act as if we teach in a vacuum, unaffected by the rest of society is short sighted" (Topping and McManus 2002). Before we can begin to address concerns and issues, it is important to understand the local culture: who we are and how we got to where we are.

Barrington Municipal High School (BMHS) first opened in 1958, consolidating several smaller community schools into one location in Barrington Passage. Our new school offered classes for grades 7 to 12, leaving primary to 6 in the community feeder schools. A later four-room addition and an annex building helped handle a growing student population, and in 1969 a new wing was added as a designated senior high portion.

The area has enjoyed the benefits through the years of a strong fishing industry, initially modest but reliable, with core fishing supplemented by processing plant work, boat building, and spin-off commercial and retail industry. While much traditional fishing faded in the Atlantic provinces over the last decade, the Barrington area still boasts one of the strongest lobster fishing industries in the world; and the economic situation remains positive for many in comparison to similar coastal areas. Individuals involved in the fishing industry demonstrate a strong work ethic and fierce independence.

This strong fishing industry is of immense value to the community, but it has an impact on the school. Many male students have opted to leave school before graduation to pursue a profitable career in the fishing industry. Statistics Canada figures for 2001 indicate that in the 35–44 age bracket,

51.5 percent of males in Barrington Municipality, and 56 percent of males from the town of Clark's Harbour, the other area feeding our school, have not completed high school. Our dropout rate, particularly for males, has improved over the past decades at a rate faster than general improvements in the province and now stands at less than 10 percent. Staff report that some graduating students indicate that they are the first in their families to complete high school.

Recognizing our community's rich maritime history, the school entered into a partnership with the Nova Scotia Community College and Scotia Halibut. This partnership provided a co-operative education credit for students in Biology 11. Students were able to explore career possibilities in aquaculture, while at the same time gaining advanced credit recognition upon their graduation from high school to the Nova Scotia Community College. This pilot has connected the community's resources to educational programming and also addressed gender issues, as females have found career options previously not considered.

Following graduation, our students generally break into thirds for post-secondary plans: one-third to university, one-third to college, and one-third seeking employment in the area. As is experienced in most rural areas, those who are successful at university, and to a lesser extent college, often migrate to the larger urban centres for employment and no return to the local area to raise their families.

In recent years, the school has faced a crisis with regard to the physical plan. It was recognized during the 1990s that the school was badly in need of renovation or replacement, and school committees were lobbying for that purpose. More of a crisis was triggered in the spring of 2002 by the outbreak of environmental problems among students and staff. As a result of investigations and remediation to try to end problems seemingly related to environmental factors, many students were removed to a variety of community locations for the completion of that year, and for the next school year the older junior high wing was permanently closed and six portable classrooms brought in to ease the space shortage. Barrington Municipal High School relocated to a new facility that opened on April 16, 2006.

Identifying the Problem

Focussing on Increasing Learning Success provided an opportunity for a committee of Barrington Municipal High School staff to identify a concern in our high school and develop a process to address it. The Elementary Literacy Assessment emphasized a need to be proactive in dealing with students identified as not meeting the literacy outcomes necessary for graduation. With the completion of a new school building, the committee recognized the opportunity to begin anew with a fresh focus on literacy.

The teaching staff at Barrington Municipal High School have long identified literacy, specifically the lack of adequate reading and writing skills, to be a problem among students. Many have wondered if our students have adequate literacy skills to cope well at the post-secondary level and worried that the lack of these skills may contribute to a difficult post-secondary transition. Certainly, many Barrington Municipal High School graduates have successfully completed a post-secondary education and achieved distinction in their chosen fields, but often the transition from high school is so challenging that some return home from post-secondary education after the first term.

As the drop-out rate at Barrington Municipal High School decreased over the last two decades, teachers reported an increase in the number of students with poor reading and writing skills. Teachers, faced with the overwhelming task of correcting inadequate reading and writing skills in larger numbers of students, felt (and still do feel) a pressure to ease standards and expectations so students might achieve high school completion.

A recent survey of our school population, carried out by the Increasing Learning Success Committee showed some interesting, although disturbing, trends among students. At the senior high level, only 15 percent of students consider themselves to be readers and report they enjoy reading. Among grade 12 students, 60 percent read 15 minutes or less each day. At the junior high level, the percentage of students who enjoy reading and consider themselves readers is only 10 percent. These statistics are likely indicative of poor reading abilities as much as a lack of interest.

The responses of the students who did not consider themselves readers generally fell into the three categories of responses typical of ineffective

readers as identified by Beers (2003) in *When Kids Can't Read, What Teachers Can Do*. Many students reported they disliked reading because they had difficulty understanding the meaning or purpose of what they were reading. New or unfamiliar vocabulary was often cited as a reason why reading was difficult. Another common response of non-readers was that reading was "boring" and "not interesting," as a result of the lack of comprehension and meaning derived from their reading. Non-reading students reported that they frequently could not find a book they liked to read.

Students often complain when they are assigned reading in class or for homework. Many find it "painful" to read beyond a page or two. It is this weakness in our non-reading students that interferes with their success in school and beyond graduation.

Reading is considered by many to be the most important area of education, and proficiency in reading is becoming even more critical in our technological society. Skill in reading is a prerequisite for many of the learning activities in content-area classes such as social studies, science, and vocational education and for successful employment and daily living. (Vaughn, Bos, and Schumm 2003)

Skill in effective reading is critical in all content areas. A math teacher expressed concern about the level of reading required for math students using the new senior high texts, particularly in the foundations courses among students struggling with numeracy. It is clear that this is a problem that must be addressed in all content areas with a consistent, unified staff approach. Every teacher must become a teacher of literacy, and this should be reinforced consistently in every class the student attends.

"Adolescents entering the adult world of the 21st century will read and write more than at any time in human history. They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens and conduct their personal lives" (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik 1999). It is anticipated that in the near future every student in Nova Scotia will be required to successfully complete a grade 9 literacy assessment in order to receive a High School Leaving Certificate. This places a strong emphasis on the development of literacy skills.

A New Commitment to Literacy

Recognizing the importance of literacy and our responsibility as educators, the staff at BMHS developed the following mission statement:

- To provide students at Barrington Municipal High School with the opportunity to acquire the strengths and develop the skills necessary to become effective readers and writers in today's society.

To promote our mission statement, three specific goals were proposed:

1. to provide all students not meeting expectations on the grade 6 literacy assessment with access to supports that will lead to successful achievement of the grade 9 literacy assessment
2. to implement school-wide standards for literacy (reading, writing, viewing, and speaking)
3. to increase parental and community supports

Discussion with staff identified literacy as an area of primary concern. Staff felt that the literacy skills of students were not adequate to meet the demands of a changing society, one that was becoming more print based. A poll of experienced teachers who had been at BMHS for more than 20 years indicated that they felt the level of students literacy skills at graduation had plummeted over their terms as teachers.

All staff must become participants in the process to encourage a climate that supports the development of literacy skills. As with the implementation of any new initiative, it is imperative to include all staff in the discussion and decision-making process.

To begin to address these identified needs, the school will discuss with the board a possible pilot that would engage a teacher with expertise in literacy to serve as a school Literacy Support Co-ordinator. This person would

work with the Increasing Learning Success Committee to look at what is happening at BMHS within the area of literacy.

Discussion with the staff resulted in school-wide commitment to literacy through development of the following:

- specific literacy programs that support literacy skills for the struggling reader and writer
- professional growth focussing on literacy
- allocated classroom time for direct literacy instruction
- allocated time for school-wide sustained silent reading (SSR)
- school-wide standards for literacy
- a cross-curricular focus on literacy skills
- a school-based team to explore literacy issues and make frequent reports to the whole school staff
- a library/media centre that supports the literacy needs of students
- a resource library for staff use
- staff-based literacy promoters
- a process for networking with parents and community members

The committee identified several factors that are currently having a positive impact on the school:

- staff awareness and commitment to improving literacy skills of all students
- staff willingness to establish a focussed professional development plan for the upcoming year
- staff members with a rich history in the school
- a new school that will support a fresh beginning
- an increased retention rate of students
- staff involvement in current graduate studies through partnership with Mount Saint Vincent University
- our 7–12 configuration, which allows consistency of delivery of supports

From this generation of ideas and with recognition of our strengths and specific literacy needs, we developed three goals.

Goal 1 is to provide all students not meeting expectations on the grade 6 literacy assessment with access to supports that will lead to successful achievement on the grade 9 literacy assessment.

Proposed Action

The government of Nova Scotia has implemented a grade 6 literacy assessment. Students who have not succeeded in either the writing or reading aspect of the assessment will be identified, and additional supports will need to be implemented.

One method of providing support to identified struggling students is the development of staff-based literacy promoters. Struggling students can meet with this variety of literacy promoters to focus and address literacy deficiencies. All staff members will participate. For example, the grade 11 chemistry teacher, as well as the grade 8 language arts teacher, will be equally involved. It will be the roles of the literacy advisor to track the student's progress through grades 7 to 9 and to liaise with the student's teachers, and the home. The literacy advisor will meet with the student on a regular basis to discuss homework, organizational skills, frustrations and areas of concern and recent successes. It will not be the responsibility of the literacy advisor to provide direct instruction in the development of literacy skills. Rather, their primary responsibility will be to track the student's progress with their literacy support plan and ensure that the development of literacy skills remains a primary focus. The literacy advisors will also be part of the grade 6 to 7 transition process to support continuity of programming. Positive and supportive relationships with their literacy advisors will help students to feel connected and valued.

Early in the school year the administration of BMHS will meet individually with parents of students who did not meet expectations on the Grade 6 Literacy Assessment to explain the Literacy Advisors Initiative and to discuss additional supports that will be provided. Information packages describing how parents can support their child will be given to each family. To encourage reading, each student will be provided with a package of reading material appropriate to his or her reading level and interests.

Goal 2 is to implement school-wide standards for literacy (reading, writing, viewing, and speaking).

Proposed Action

The implementation team identified the development of school-wide literacy standards and expectations as a key component to the successful development of "good" literacy skills for all students. It was felt that a unified and comprehensive approach that was equally supported in all curriculum areas (math, science, English, PDR, etc.) would yield the most notable results. In order to achieve this goal the following strategies were identified:

- Develop a comprehensive professional development plan, with the input of the entire staff, that will provide a focussed, comprehensive, and sequential approach. Extensive professional development will be required if this project is to be successful. It must be recognized that not all teachers on staff have the same background knowledge, expertise, or comfort level with literacy-based issues. Staff will need to develop a common understanding and language regarding what literacy is, what it takes to be a good reader and writer, and what happens when you do not apply good reading and writing strategies.
- Develop common practices regarding school-wide literacy that will be implemented in all curriculum areas. This will ensure that the same standards and expectations are followed in all curriculum areas. For example, for essay writing there would be an understanding of the requirements for the cover page, format, and method of citing sources that is applied consistently in all courses.
- Implement school-wide activities such as "this month is brought to you by ..." Each month will focus on a different grammatical rule (punctuation, capital letters, run-on sentences). Specified classes construct a media blitz (posters) that state the grammatical rules. These are placed throughout the school. For that month, all staff focus on this particular rule, explaining proper use and marking all assignments and papers accordingly. This concentrated focus will help students to internalize proper grammar usage.

- Develop a means to monitor and assess the effectiveness of our approach: Is what we are doing having the desired effect?
- Continue with school-wide sustained silent reading (SSR). During the 2003–2004 school year SSR was implemented school wide for 16 minutes following the recess break as one method to increase time spent reading. Staff and students were interviewed to determine the impact of SSR. The majority of students responded positively, stating that SSR helped them to focus. Several students who previously considered themselves slow readers noted an improvement in their reading. Many stated it was the only time they read for pleasure.
- Organize a student book club.
- Acquire a broad selection of text from which students may choose. It is commonly held that students are more receptive to reading if they are provided with material that is at their comfort level.

Goal 3 is to increase parental and community support.

Proposed Action

Through parent meetings and information sessions, media presentations, and school memos, parents will be encouraged to support literacy at home and the development of their child's literacy skills and interest in literacy in the following ways:

- Make a wide variety of reading material available at home. To support this, the school will initiate library membership for each student.
- Model reading in the home. To explore this, the school will explore a parent workshop on literacy.
- Encouraging contact with teachers regarding their child's reading abilities. The school will support this through the Literacy Advisors Initiative.
- Encourage parent membership on committees and councils at school. Parent involvement on the School Advisory Council will help sustain our focus on literacy as part of our School Improvement Plan.

Communication with the home and community will be supported by

- school notes and student agendas
- use of local media
- presentations at community groups

- weekend workshop on supporting your child as a learner (homework skills, study skills, literacy skills)
- parental representation on school committees
- school newsletters and a website with a link to a literacy home page

It is important to have a process for evaluating the impact of any initiative. How can we be sure we are meeting our goals?

The committee identified several methods for evaluating success:

- Compare the number of students who meet expectations on the grade 9 literacy assessments with the number at the grade 6 level. It is the goal of the committee to significantly reduce the number of students not meeting expectations.
- Re-administer the student survey referred to earlier in this chapter and compare the data.
- Track the first term results of the graduating cohort attending post-secondary education for five years.
- By 2010 compare the percentage of students who successfully move to post-secondary institutions with the success of a graduating class in 2005 and 2006.

In September, 2008 Barrington Municipal High School will begin the school accreditation process. Part of this process will involve data collection from parents on several initiatives, including literacy. This process will provide useful feedback on how successful we are with literacy promotion, and other goals.

Section 10: Enhancing Student Engagement at Lockview High School

Halifax Regional School Board

Our Beginnings

Lockview High School opened in September of 2000, The Chinese Year of the Dragon. We brought together numerous communities and students that had never been together in the past. This school opening brought with it many controversial and contentious issues, but it also brought an incredible opportunity, an opportunity to write on a clean slate, to create a new school community and culture. It presented an opportunity to create history and a school with no past—only a future!!!

The staff of Lockview came primarily from four schools that were losing students to the new school. The remainder of the staff came from various other schools across the Halifax Regional School Board.

The diverse backgrounds and experiences of our staff allowed for open minds and opportunities. We would, together, have the opportunity to create every aspect of this school. What would the Student Support Model look like? How would we operate Students' Council? What policies and procedures would we use for attendance, assessment, and evaluation? What would we stand for? What would we not stand for?

The clean slate presented every opportunity possible. Tremendous and exciting work was ahead!

The Principal Sets the Tone

The influence of the principal in all schools is very powerful and often determines the overall climate and culture of the school. It is the principal's beliefs and values that have great influence in determining the models and procedures that are used every day.

For the Principal of Lockview, inclusionary education was a must. Therefore, every decision regarding the Learning Centres and resource was going to be vital to the success of inclusion and how to operate as a school. Like all other aspects of the school, staff were cutting new ground in determining the way to support student learning and inclusion.

Learning Centre vs. Student Support—A Name Can Mean So Much

Staff wanted to change the role of the Learning Centre and to do this they had to begin by changing the name. They changed it to "Student Support Department," meaning that all students would find support here, not only students on individualized program plans (IPPs) but ALL students. Inclusion would begin by all students being included in this place that was here to support all students and teachers.

This automatically would bring many different students together all with a common goal, to be successful in their schooling, regardless of who they were or their ability level. Here, they could find support and assistance from both the teachers and their fellow students.

Physical Location of Our Student Support Department

Student support had to be a team effort, meaning it involved not only our student support staff but also many other people in the building. Therefore, its physical location had to be central and close to the main office and the

guidance department. This vital triangle would allow us to work closely together in supporting student learning.

This central location also recognized the Student Support Department as a vital and pivotal component of our school. It raised its profile as an important and central place where many students were supported in their learning and studies.

This location helped to remove the stigma of the "Learning Centres" and helped to create a "Student Support Centre," which was accessible to all students. The central location also allowed the administration, guidance, and student support to work in close proximity while supporting students and their success.

Naming a Student Support Co-ordinator and Determining His or Her Role

Student support is now central not only in the values of the school, but also in its location in the building. The next obvious step was to name a co-ordinator and include that person in all aspects of the school and decision making.

Our student support co-ordinator is included as one of our curriculum co-ordinators (department heads) and thus attends all meetings and is part of the decision-making processes of the school. Discussions at these meetings began to include issues of student support and how the department could help to meet the needs of our students and teachers.

Student support is now no longer an add-on, instead it is as important as our science or English departments, and it has an equal voice. The co-ordinator has the same opportunities to be involved in shaping school policy, procedures, and decisions. This means that all students have a voice at this table, and it once again moved us a step closer to the inclusion of all students.

Our Vision of Inclusion

At Lockview High, staff envision a quality inclusive school in which every person is welcomed, valued, and supported, and to which everyone contributes.

- An inclusive school includes everyone and ensures that all students receive a quality education that addresses their intellectual, human, social, and career development.
- It provides all students with enhanced opportunities to learn from each other's contributions.
- It provides the necessary supports and services to assist students in meeting their goals.
- It provides resources, strategies, time, and training for teachers as a basic foundation for an inclusive school.

Working toward Our Vision

At Lockview High our goal is to build a school climate around student support and to raise the bar for everyone. Our staff first focussed on educating themselves through a series of workshops. These workshops included the following topics:

- Inclusive Schooling Student Support Department (make-up and roles)
- Role of the Classroom Teacher, Support Teacher and Educational Program Assistants
- Learning Styles and Differential Instruction Ranges of Programming
- Individual Program Plans
- Program Adaptations and Learning Disabilities
- Enrichment and Tri-level Teaching

We challenge ourselves to act in *small everyday ways* to build a community in which all are welcome, each belongs, and everyone collaborates to make our whole school community work with mutual respect. Through educating themselves, staff have come to understand the diversity in our classrooms, and continue to look for ways to find effective strategies to meet student needs.

Programming for All

Lockview developed a Student Support Department that attempts to support the needs of all 1200 students. Programming is developed based on the diverse needs at our school. Teachers, guidance counsellors, administrators, and parents meet regularly to discuss student needs and programming. A wide range of programming has been developed and appropriate supports have been put in place to assist with these programs.

Extensive planning occurs around students who require individual program plans. Parents, teachers, guidance counsellors, administrators, and outside professionals all participate in the development of these plans. When students enter high school, we discuss their needs to prepare them for a valuable community life after high school completion. Areas discussed are academics, social skills, employment opportunities, post-secondary opportunities, leisure and recreation, housing, and financial planning.

Transition planning for the future is an integral part of the student's individual plan, and it is necessary that it be developed throughout the student's high school years. Annual goals are set, and individual outcomes are developed for each of the student's courses. At this time, resources and strategies are put into place.

We strongly practise the idea of "only as special as necessary" as stated in the *Special Education Policy*. Staff look at natural supports and strategies before adding paraprofessional support in the classroom. It is important to note that the role of paraprofessionals can be extremely useful in providing educational support. Staff must monitor supports to minimize barriers to students developing relationships with other classmates. Taking time to educate staff in their role is essential for developing inclusive classrooms. Strategies for working as a team and developing independence for students are key in promoting such practices.

Another important focus when creating an individual plan is the development of social and personal skills through co-curricular involvement. At Lockview, students with significant challenges sit on student council and participate in many clubs and sports activities; they are seen as equal members of our school and community.

We value the social and emotional well-being of the school community; therefore, staff works closely with the Teen Lifestyles Centre staff to support the mental and physical health of all students.

Working toward Enrichment

In May 2002, Lockview High went through the site-based planning process. Goal Two, for implementation during the 2002–03 school year, was to "increase supports for student learning to meet the needs of all learners."

As previously stated, we had already begun in-servicing staff about inclusion and adapting curriculum for students with learning challenges. It was a natural progression to develop a committee to work toward expanding the supports for student learning to include the entire school population.

Steps We Took

The committee members reflected the various curriculum departments and included the student support person and a guidance counsellor. Through in-service days and after-school meetings, the committee members sought to educate themselves about school-wide enrichment.

Some of the steps we took are as follows.

- We made a presentation was made to all staff to introduce school-wide enrichment and participated in creative activities.
- The committee members met for a day to acquaint Lockview staff with the *Challenge for Excellence* document and to brainstorm long-term goals as a committee.
- We read various articles on different aspects of enrichment, such as curriculum compacting, enrichment clusters, using multiple intelligences to adapt to curriculum, and shared these articles with each other.
- We established the goal of the committee as follows: To facilitate the learning of all students at all levels by increasing teacher awareness, supporting staff through program development, building a library of resources for all levels of students, and creating a positive atmosphere where diversity is accepted.

- The committee members continue to educate themselves, but also put together an in-service for all staff on brain-based learning, using anchoring activities and tiered lesson plans.
- We are encouraging all staff to contribute lesson plans they have adapted to meet the needs of low-end or high-end learners. These lesson plans will be made available to all staff, and we will continue to build on these until we have a varied reference selection for staff to use.
- Another way we are supporting staff is by ordering enrichment materials for our staff reference library and by continuing to develop the knowledge and skills of the committee members so that we will be available to assist staff in developing materials, for individual students, small groups, or the entire class so that each student can be challenged as much as possible.

The Next Steps

After four years we feel that we have made great strides. We continue to work hard to develop our program to meet the needs of all students. Future plans include

- continuing to educate staff in making adaptations across the curriculum
- continuing to build our resource library
- increasing the range of programming and learning opportunities for our students
- developing an ongoing partnership with the Teen Lifestyle Centre, which promotes and educates our student population about social and emotional issues
- collaborating with two local high schools to share resources, materials, and ideas about enrichment

The progress we have made at Lockview High over the past four years has been both exciting and rewarding. Developing an inclusive school is a process that must include a committed team with a clear vision for supporting student learning.

I see our children as kites, you spend a lifetime trying to get them off the ground ...

- Erma Bombeck

Section 11: Enhancing Student Engagement at Queen Elizabeth High School[1]

Halifax Regional School Board

Introduction

The rationale behind *Increasing Learning Success* is based on new understandings that aim to change the strategies that will support the diverse needs of both students and teachers. In the *Blueprint for Improvement,* a position paper issued by Halifax Regional School Board, it was recognized that most students are receiving a good education, but it is also acknowledged that we as educators have not yet mastered our approach to educating the full range of students in our schools. It is therefore important that new strategies for school and board improvement are implemented. In the past, our schools have increasingly focussed on programs that would allow students who were already meeting with high levels of academic success to excel further. However, in the process we moved away from programming that allowed students a wide range of learning opportunities both within and without the traditional classroom settings. The result was a greater number of students who withdrew from school before completion of their programs, students who were suspended for long periods of time, and students who felt overwhelmed and struggled to achieve in the regular classroom setting.

Students are failing to progress for a variety of reasons. As many as 35 percent of all students will not achieve success during their high school years (many

1 Queen Elizabeth High School and St. Patrick's High School merged into one with the construction of Citadel High, which opened in September 2007.

being young males). The main reasons cited for this lack of success are boredom and the desire/need to work. Other reasons include the following:

- They do not enjoy school.
- They express dissatisfaction with their courses and school rules.
- They have problems with their teachers.
- They do not participate in extra-curricular activities.
- They participate less in classes than other students.
- They have friends who are not attending any school.
- They associate with peers who do not consider high school completion important.
- They do not fit in at school.
- They do not perceive their school experiences as relevant.
- They are overwhelmed by their life experiences.

Queen Elizabeth High School

Queen Elizabeth, now part of Citadel High School, was a comprehensive urban high school (grades 10–12) which operated on the corner of Bell Road and Robie Street since September 1942. It had a grand history of having served, with distinction and pride, generations of students from peninsular Halifax. We maintained a dedicated and highly professional staff whose expertise enabled us to offer a range of programs designed, as much as possible, to meet the individual needs, interests, and abilities of our students. Although deteriorating, our facilities included an excellent library, art rooms, music rooms, technology education shops, science laboratories, computer laboratories, family studies rooms, a reading resource room, a learning support centre, an ESL centre, a gymnasium, an auditorium, and a full service cafeteria.

QEH Lions were encouraged to adopt our school motto, *"Facere Faciendo Discimus,"* which means "We Learn to Do by Doing," in both curricular and co-curricular activities. Our students earned academic honours, which included 10 Rhodes Scholarships, awards in public speaking and debating, success in math and science competitions, and recognition in music and the fine arts. Our students were also encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities such as Canada's oldest High School Model Parliament, the High School Drama Festival, a student newspaper, and classic Broadway musicals. Our sports programs, including football, basketball, soccer, volleyball, field

hockey, badminton, cheerleading, hockey, track, and skiing, enabled our students to distinguish themselves in local and provincial championships.

For the first time, in September 2003, QEH delivered courses to its 940 students in a semestered model. As anticipated, both students and staff had some anxieties as to the impact this educational model would have on student success, which has been of a consistently high nature. At-risk students, in particular, could be negatively affected by the change as many were already dealing with a variety of issues that affected their learning success. To lessen the impact of the semestered system on these students, a new program—STARS (Success Targets Aimed at Returning Students)—was developed. It was focussed on pre-planning and preparation of the student in recognized areas of concern that, hopefully, would create a smooth transition not only to semestering but also in terms of their overall learning success.

At the same time, the school was looking at how to foster a broader range of non-academic learning opportunities for students. At a time when the cost of post-secondary education is rising substantially, any forward-looking and student-centred program that would allow students an opportunity to gain valuable insight into career possibilities was seen as progressive. QEH already had a co-op program in place but the number of students availing themselves of this opportunity was still an area in which improvement could be realized. Thus, it was noted that, with some organizational restructuring, this could fill that educational avenue.

Queen Elizabeth High School had implemented some strategies in the past and was implementing strategies that aimed to engage students in ways that (1) would increase academic success among the at-risk population who otherwise might be early leavers and (2) create alternative learning opportunities they gain through on-the-job work experience. The first strategy focussed on at-risk students who left school (dropped out, non-attenders) and chose to return. The second strategy dealt with providing a socially beneficial opportunity to assess various workplace environments in order to give students a head start in making career choices in their later lives. Both initiatives aimed to increase student learning and success in non-traditional ways as the school rethought past practices in light of its new understanding of the student, intelligence, and how a learning environment is created.

Success Targets Aimed at Returning Students

Success Targets Aimed at Returning Students (STARS) was a pilot project conducted at QEH from (September 2003–June 2004) in an attempt to meet the needs of a specific group of at-risk students—the 'early leaver' or high school dropout. This program received pilot project funding from the Learning for Life initiative of the government of Nova Scotia. The idea was to identify and plan aspects of the student's personal and school life that assist them in managing the transition from secondary school to post-secondary school or the workplace. Outcomes for the program included

Number of students in co-op in 2003–04	82
Number of students doing summer co-op	8 [10%]
Number of students in a semestered program	43 [52%]
Number of students in a full-year program	31 [38%]
Number of males in co-op	19 [23%]
Number of females in co-op	63 [77%]
Number of students who will successfully complete program by June 2004	75 [91%]
Number of students who will continue program in 2004 to 2005 school year	4 [5%]
Number of students who withdrew from co-op/school	3 [4%]

Many of the risk factors identified by the students at QEH in the STARS program correlated closely to those identified in *Increasing Learning Success*. Also of relevant interest was the awareness of some of the students that they were not able to meet the outcomes of their courses due to areas of weakness that heretofore have not been addressed. Poor study skills and poor time management can be magnified when combined with weak literacy and math skills. Realization of such weaknesses allows for strategic planning to minimize the impact on the learner.

The STARS participants in semester one (Group One) attended a meeting during the first week of school where they were given an overview of the components of the STARS project and its goals. The students then completed a survey, the results of which formed the basis of a needs assessment for the semester two workshops. Each participant was then matched with a volunteer staff mentor as a way of more closely monitoring student progress and providing additional support.

The new STARS participants in semester two (Group Two) attended three morning workshops during the semester one exam week (January 26–28, 2004). Workshop topics included STARS Project Introduction, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens, Assessing Your 'At Risk' Factors, Meet the QEH Resource People, Reading Level Indicator Test, Myers Briggs Personality Measure, Technology Update and Interactive Careers Web Sites, Your Personality and Career Choices, and How to Prepare for a Job Interview. The workshops were a mandatory component of the student's re-entry to school and helped to demonstrate the student's commitment to re-entering the education system.

The goal of the workshops was to help the student gain a greater self-awareness of their learning styles, strengths, and needs and to focus on goal-setting before their re-entry into the system. A total of 22 students attended the workshops.

Following the workshop sessions, the STARS co-ordinator and the QEH resource teacher worked together to determine the literacy needs of the STARS participants. The students' files were reviewed, and the results of the Reading Level Indicator Test were compiled. As a result, seven previously unidentified students were referred to the resource centre for additional academic support.

Staff mentorship was ongoing for both Group One and Group Two participants. One of the priorities of the mentorship program was to celebrate student success. Mentors have devised personalized incentives and rewards to provide the students with positive feedback. For example, just prior to the March break, eight students with excellent attendance records and passing grades were delighted to each receive a $10.00 movie certificate for the long weekend.

The intent of STARS was to focus on the essential graduation learnings components that have traditionally been problematic for many at-risk students—citizenship, communication, personal, and problem-solving. By addressing these areas, STARS aimed to put in place the support and opportunities that lead to a positive learning environment for the students at risk and, more generally, the school system in which QEH is a member.

Co-operative Education

Co-operative Education is a career-oriented instructional program designed to integrate classroom theory with practical experience in the workplace. It is a mode of experiential learning that combines the co-ordinated resources of the school and the community. Partnerships with the community are established so that, in addition to attending regular classes, students participate in a career exploration, planning, and placement opportunity.

Queen Elizabeth High was one of several metro high schools offering a credit course in Co-operative Education. Each school's program is individual and has its own focus, while at the same time similar, in that students earn a high school credit for the work they do as part of the co-op course. At Queen Elizabeth the administration and teaching staff strongly supported the co-op initiative and believed that students at the high school level should be exposed to educational and career planning.

At QEH, co-op was open to students in grades 11 and 12. They selected a career area they are interested in exploring and applied for the co-op course. Students admitted to co-op had gone through a selection interview process and had been recommended by two or more teachers. They received a regular academic credit for their participation in the course.

The co-op program has two components: one, in school, the other, at the workplace. The in-school component required the students to attend and participate in approximately 25 hours of instruction. Students learned career decision-making skills and job search strategies and were exposed to present issues in employment. Every student in the co-op program completed an employability skills portfolio.

The employability skills portfolio was designed to display a student's success in developing personal management, fundamental, and teamwork employability skills—and to raise student self-esteem. Through the process of constructing their portfolios, students gained a greater awareness of any potential weaknesses and were able to develop strategies to improve upon their skills, thus making themselves more attractive and marketable in terms of attaining employment.

The out-of-school component required the student to complete a minimum of 100 hours at a workplace. The timing for completing this component was somewhat flexible depending on the student's timetable and the particular placement. Times in the evenings, weekends, or summer could be scheduled. QEH was one of only two schools that offer summer co-op. This concept met with great success and strong interest at both the board and department level. Arrangements for independent co-op were possible in particular cases. Most co-op students were at their placement once a week, and community co-operators were kept informed on their placements' schedules. The belief at QEH was that co-op must be flexible and that the possibility must exist for a high school student to explore a career.

The community co-operator ("employer"), along with the Co-op Co-ordinator, provided supervision and assistance for the student as they explored their chosen career area and developed their employment skills. The student placement was supported by a training profile designed by the Co-op Co-ordinator and the employer. The student, parent, and employer entered a contract outlining the general responsibilities of all parties and confirming the provision of risk insurance by the school board. The student also signed a declaration of confidentiality. Monitoring of the placement was done by the Co-op Co-ordinator on a regular basis. Conferences with the student and the student's supervisor, visits to the workplace, and student journal writing were all part of the process.

The success of the Queen Elizabeth program resulted in students exploring a large variety of career areas and greatly enhanced their ability to make informed career decisions. New community co-operators were continually established. Career exploration was an enriching experience for our students and the co-operators who become involved with the program. Co-operation, commitment, and community made the continued success of the program possible.

During the 2003–04 school year, over 75 students were involved in the Co-operative Education program at Queen Elizabeth High School. For many of the students involved it meant invaluable training experience, as it enabled them to realize the strengths they possess, while on the other hand it made others aware of the areas that must be improved to enhance their abilities to successfully follow their career paths. The relevance and importance of course selection is enhanced, and development of the "soft skills" is emphasized.

Next Steps

In addition to the two initiatives described above, other efforts were made to increase student success. Queen Elizabeth High School and St. Pat's High School collaborated to share resources to further opportunities for student achievement, as these two large high schools merged into one with the construction of Citadel High, which opened in September 2007. The schools shared resources and co-ordinated course offerings. To maximize high school course opportunities for peninsular high school students, family studies courses, language courses, technology courses, and advanced courses, were offered based on the co-operative efforts of both school communities. In essence, many students benefited from programming options at both schools. Moreover, in anticipation of the merger of these two school communities guidance and administration worked together to ensure similar expectations for the incoming grade 10 students who will form the first graduating class of the new peninsular high school.

Section 12: Enhancing Student Engagement at Sydney Academy

Cape Breton–Victoria Regional School Board

Sydney Academy, founded in 1841, is a school with a rich tradition in academic, athletic, and other extracurricular endeavours. Sydney Academy strives to create a dynamic school environment that will enable each student to develop an ability to think clearly, to communicate effectively, and to make sound judgments. The school endeavours to expose students to the values of the past, the excitement of the present, and the challenge of the future.

The present building housing Sydney Academy was built in 1959 with a major addition added in 1967. The present building is the sixth one in the long history of the school.

Sydney Academy is, first and foremost, a teaching and learning community. Our varied curricular offerings, combined with an extensive extracurricular program, offer to each student many opportunities to succeed. At the same time, staff works hard to ensure that students are safe and feel safe in the school. Sydney Academy has its own on-site teen health centre. The School Advisory Council is a strong advocacy vehicle for school improvement and has initiated such positive additions as a new exercise room and the development of an alumni association. Sydney Academy is often described as a venerable institution that values its history and its traditions. Intellectual pursuits are valued as are such attributes as tolerance and respect for others and their ideas. One strength of Sydney Academy is the great number of opportunities that students have to exercise leadership. Sydney Academy is becoming increasingly multicultural. In addition to its African-Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq students, Sydney Academy welcomes students from many other countries through the Nova Scotia International Student Program. Sydney Academy is especially proud of the school's debating and public speaking teams, which have achieved national and international recognition in recent years.

Sydney Academy strives to serve all students. It offers a wide variety of courses ranging from special needs, high school leaving, university preparatory, and the International Baccalaureate Program. The program planning team reviews the needs of individual students and may recommend adaptations or, where appropriate, the development of individualized program plans.

Some students receive programming support through the school's integrated resource centres while others benefit from programming and services provided by the resource teacher either in the classroom through co-teaching or in a classroom. We wish to highlight two major initiatives that Sydney Academy undertakes in supporting student success. The first initiative involves the implementation of the grade 10 extended math pilot. This course extends both time for learning and the outcomes to be achieved in an attempt to increase opportunities for success. The second initiative is intended to provide for the special needs of gifted students. Both of these initiatives require a departure from traditional scheduling to a more flexible arrangement. Sydney Academy now has a hybrid schedule where the Math 10 extended courses and the grade 12 International Baccalaureate courses are taught for the full year in an otherwise semestered environment.

International Baccalaureate Program

Sydney Academy has offered the International Baccalaureate Program since 1987. The following excerpt from the International Baccalaureate North America provides an explanation of the program.

> The International Baccalaureate Programme (IB) is a comprehensive and rigorous two-year curriculum, leading to examinations, for students aged between sixteen and nineteen. Based on the pattern of no single country, it is a deliberate compromise between the specialization required in some national systems and the breadth preferred in others. The general objectives of the IB are to provide students with a balanced education; to facilitate geographic and cultural mobility; and to promote international understanding through a shared academic experience.

IB courses are recognized as advanced courses at grades 11 and 12 and may be credited towards graduation requirements whether taken as part of a complete IB Program or as discrete courses.

Students who intend to take the IB Program at Sydney Academy normally enrol in the introductory, Pre-IB Program in their grade 10 year. During this year, teachers introduce aspiring IB students to intellectual concepts, logical processes, and essential prerequisite material that will allow success in the IB Program. Students at the junior high level across the school board make application and after consultation with teachers, guidance counsellors, and parents, enter the Pre-IB Program. These students typically are high achievers, are self-motivated, and have a passion for learning.

The IB Program is a unique educational experience that serves four purposes: it allows an opportunity for students to earn advanced university standing; increases access to university entrance scholarships; permits the student a wider choice of post-secondary institutions; and, provides an academic challenge to students that is well beyond the traditional public high school environment. The program is educational excellence in action. The IB Program has a number of unique components that constitute the full diploma program. Included are selected courses from six areas of study, a theory of knowledge course, and a 4000-word extended essay. All diploma students must also engage in an activity that requires creativity, action, and service (the CAS element) for the time equivalent of an afternoon per week. The CAS component comprises a significant extra-curricular and co-curricular component—debating, conflict resolution seminars, hiking, and volunteerism. Through the IB Program and its extensions, local students have climbed mountains in the highlands of Cape Breton and New England and participated in public speaking and debating championships in London, Crete, Australia, New Zealand, Jamaica, Boston, New York, Montreal, and Toronto.

Challenge for Excellence (Nova Scotia Department of Education 1998) states the case for programming for gifted students quite succinctly.

> While the educational system strives to provide and facilitate a wide range of educational experiences and opportunities, there are students who require extended challenges in order to meet their full potential. Winebrenner and Devlin (1994) note that students with gifts and talents need exactly what all other students need, "consistent opportunity to learn new material and to develop the behaviors that allow them to cope with the challenge and struggle of new learning." Alternative program planning is as important for gifted students as it is for any student with special needs.

The IB Program was implemented at Sydney Academy in order to address the needs of students who required a unique and challenging university preparatory program. The IB Program was chosen because it provides an excellent program of teacher training, comprehensive curriculum, exemplary criterion-referenced evaluation procedures, and an elaborate support system.

The IB Program has allowed students to take the full diploma program or to opt for certificates in individual courses offered at the IB level at Sydney Academy. The majority of IB students at Sydney Academy take the certificate route. Since 1999 over 230 students have been awarded IB Certificates, and 24 have been awarded the IB Diploma.

Students who go through the IB Program at the diploma or certificate level are well prepared for university, maintaining high academic standing, and are ranked among the top 10 percent of their class. They are involved in a variety of extra-curricular and community service activities. Students from Sydney Academy's IB Program are awarded generous scholarships from Atlantic and national universities. When asked, graduates maintain that they are very well prepared for the rigours of university study. Many universities offer credit or advanced standing for IB courses taken in high school. These students continue to excel in post-secondary and post-graduate programs. Graduates of Sydney Academy's IB Program maintain contact with the school and, time after time, relate the tremendous benefits of the program.

The IB Program has provided benefits for teachers as well. The excellent teacher training workshops provide teachers with practical strategies that are carried to all courses offered in the school. The excitement of teaching and working with motivated and passionate students is infectious. The program helps to promote the ideals of IB throughout the school both in the classroom and beyond. Witnessing the success of students as they excel in high school and beyond is very rewarding.

The IB Program has made a difference in the operation of Sydney Academy through such things as innovations in scheduling, lunch programs, after school programs, community service, and the continuation of a world-class debating program. Both students and staff maintain that the IB Program is a positive experience and an integral component in Sydney Academy's success.

Students' Comments

The following comments from students are a testament to the value accorded the program in their eyes.

Jonathan Yazer, Sydney Academy IB Diploma 2003, University of Western Ontario

Universities and colleges appreciate the lessons IB students have learned. Academics aside, IB students are better equipped to deal with the pressures of university life. Juggling simultaneous responsibilities, IB students can better manage their time in order to meet important deadlines. IB students have more time and energy to devote to extracurricular activities and are more involved than an average student, communicate well and work well in teams, and think in terms that are creative and innovative. They have a competitive edge, and universities reward them accordingly.

With the importance of a higher education in mind, the IB Program takes a holistic approach to learning. Special status is accorded to IB students because they learn a wide variety of material covering the major branches of thought, including the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. An IB student is well versed in philosophy and phylogeny, vectors and Versailles. The IB curriculum is founded on the principles of skepticism, critical thought, and free inquiry and constantly challenges students to reach their full potential. By examining a wide variety of topics while maintaining a significant degree of choice in its curriculum, the IB Program teaches the lessons and values befitting a student of the modern global village. Around the world, the IB Diploma is unmatched in rigor, integrity, and value.

The Sydney Academy IB Program is exceptional for the personal attention it devotes to its students. While most classes bulge with students, students in the IB Program find themselves in small groups and receive more direct assistance from their instructors.

The IB Program does more than educate. It builds a community of ideas and people and unites students with similar goals and interests. The friendships fostered by IB last well after high school graduation.

Kayla MacIntyre, Sydney Academy Graduate 2003, Political Science and Sociology Majors Student at the University of New Brunswick

My IB experience was of great benefit to me. I have some of my fondest memories of high school in IB classes. I travelled over 40 minutes daily for the IB Program, and it was all worth it. In choosing high schools you may not recognize how useful IB can be, but be sure to explore all of the options, and this program will surely help you in academic pursuits. In IB I developed a great work ethic, many enduring friendships, and improved my confidence in academics. I have gained scholarships, have a competitive edge in many first-year classes, and I have learned a great deal. I am going to graduate half a year early from university because of transfer credits. This saves myself valuable time and upward of five thousand dollars. Most of my favorite teachers from high school were from my IB courses, and these people will give you the help you need to become a great student. Give IB a try and you will no doubt enjoy it.

Rosie Smith, IB Diploma Candidate (Student from Victoria County who boarded in Sydney in order to attend the IB Program)

Although challenging at times, the International Baccalaureate Program is definitely a worthwhile experience. The courses are more in depth and encourage independent thought of the students, which makes the material more interesting. Also, many of the classes are extremely relaxed, and the teachers are able to spend more time with the students. The Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) element of the IB Diploma was fun, and I even enjoyed writing the Extended Essay as it gave me the opportunity to learn more about something I was interested in but that was not included in my courses. Having been in French Immersion in Junior High, I was concerned that I would lose my ability to speak French in high school. However, I was able to take the French/Certificate Program as well as IB; I am still fluent in French. Quite a bit of additional work is required for the IB Diploma; however, I would definitely do it again and would recommend it to others.

Section 13: Successful Secondary Schools— A Summary

Successful secondary schools do things differently from those that are less effective. They are caring and safe learning communities. They purposively and actively engage students in relevant and engaging learning activities. They organize time, space, people, and resources to promote student belonging and success. They communicate clearly, frequently, and in a variety of ways. They organize orientation and transition activities and strategies to facilitate students' high school experience. They build positive partnerships with parents and the community to extend learning opportunities. They ensure teachers' continuous improvement and growth through strong professional development programs. In sum, they are focussed clearly on student-centred learning and success for all students.

Successful secondary schools are caring and safe learning communities. They organize a peer support system; they have a clear set of core beliefs and values that guide planning, decision making, and actions; they organize a diverse and inclusive co-curricular program; they create a web of adult support structures; and they personalize and individualize students' learning experiences.

Successful secondary schools actively engage students in learning. They are student-centred. They offer engaging and relevant curriculum; cross-disciplinary learning experiences for students; and effective teachers who are coaches and facilitators and who use a variety of teaching strategies, including technology, appropriately and frequently.

Successful secondary schools use a range and variety of assessment strategies. They give students options for demonstrating their knowledge and competencies; they have assessment policies and practices that are clear and student centred; and they actively involve students in their own assessment by using performance assessment, rubrics, portfolios, self-assessment, peer-assessment, and exhibitions.

Successful secondary schools organize in ways that support student learning and success. They restructure space; they reorganize timetables and schedules; they ensure flexible groupings of students; they create smaller units within the larger school; and they allocate resources related to school goals.

Successful secondary schools communicate clearly, regularly, effectively, and efficiently with students and staff inside the school and with parents and the community outside the school. They ensure that everyone is clearly informed about priorities (expectations), programs, policies, procedures, possibilities, and the performance of both students and the school.

Successful secondary schools facilitate students' transitions into and out of high schools and from year to year; they organize beginning-of-school and end-of-school activities for all grade levels; they have strategies for making organizational changes and transitions; and they prepare students for those changes and transitions.

Successful secondary schools become extended communities, engaging the larger society in support of student and school success. They reach out and actively recruit and organize the human resources of their communities in order to meet the needs of all students; they invite the community into the school; and they facilitate student learning in the community at large.

Successful secondary schools support and ensure teacher learning and growth. They focus on both individual and collective capacity building; they have structures and policies that ensure that teacher learning is routine and embedded in the schedule; they promote strategies that encourage teachers to talk frequently about improving instruction; and they link with school improvement professional standards, teacher learning, and teacher evaluation.

Successful secondary schools have strong leaders who are focussed on improving instruction for all students, in all subject areas, across the school. They strive to continuously improve classrooms and the school; they build partnerships in the community; they are collaborative and build powerful teams; and they are effective managers and organizers.

Our high schools can work for all students. Achieving this vision will require restructuring, retiming, and, most importantly, reculturing. Changing school organization, schedules, and timetables are good starting points. But until we focus on the culture of high schools as learning communities, there will continue to be winners and losers. The student population served by the public schools continues to change. If demographic predictions for Canada in the next 20 years are correct, there will be a growing number of at-risk students, and diversity will continue to increase. Such youngsters as these will remain in school *only* if there is more emphasis on teaching and learning and less on sorting and selecting.

Appendix A: High School Stories and Examples

Many high schools have made a commitment to make their schools student centred and to increase the opportunities for all students to be successful. They have made changes in programs, practices, policies, and procedures to enhance student learning opportunities. Each school has made different choices, but they are illustrative of the possibilities and alternatives available to all high schools. This list is a sample of high schools indicating some of the specific interventions that have been implemented. No school made changes in all areas; although many revamped and redesigned a majority of components of a traditional high school. Substantive changes have been made in how curriculum is delivered, how instruction is organized, and how students are held accountable. These schools represent a subset of the many schools in North America committed to make a difference for the next generation. They are embracing change, not simply tinkering with the status quo.

Bel Air High, El Paso TX

- reconstituted staff
- intense focus on improving academics
- student reports every three weeks to parents
- parent involvement

Best Practices High School, Chicago IL

- hybrid schedule
- teacher advisory groups
- internships
- interdisciplinary units
- peer mediation
- staff retreats and multiple strategies for teacher learning
- high teacher involvement in decision making

Bishops College High School, St. John's NL

- technology focus
- business partnerships

Central Park East Secondary School, Harlem NY

- community service internships
- graduation by portfolio
- habits of mind

Glenlawn High School, Winnipeg MB

- new curriculum
- student voice

Lincoln High School, Stockton CA

- multiple intelligences-based instruction in all classrooms
- projects required in all classes
- integrated studies program
- performance assessment
- extensive use of self-assessment
- portfolio assessment in language arts

Loganville High School, Loganville GA

- high parent involvement
- teacher advisory groups

Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Centre (the Met), Providence RI

- internships
- advisor–advisee groups
- individualized programs

Mountlake Terrace High School, Mountlake Terrace WA

- multiple intelligences-based instruction
- project-based learning
- integrated studies
- performance-based assessment
- application project required for graduation
- development of student intellectual talents

Sir Frances Drake High, San Anselmo CA

- integrated studies
- teacher teams
- teacher advisory groups
- learning academies
- two goals: rigor and relevance
- internships and experiential learning off campus
- parent and community involvement

Sussex Technical High School, Georgetown DE

- internships
- cohort groups of 15–20 students in vocational specialities
- parent involvement (contracts and judging senior projects)
- senior projects

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